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Refugee learning tour group visits
Kakuma and Kyangwali . . . p. 12

Making a difference with MMI . . . p. 14



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Nigeria's crucial elections threatened by corruption

Harry der Nederlanden

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has just had its elections. As I write, only the elections for state governor have been held and those for president are still to happen. By every indication, however, the election is in the bag for the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). It won in almost all of Nigeria's 36 states.

Nigeria is a democracy, but corruption is so endemic that *The Atlantic* called Nigeria "the largest failed state on earth." According to most reports, the first round of elections was largely a meaningless ritual. No one accepts them as legitimate and fair. Vote-rigging and fraud were so blatant, according to *The Economist*, that all opposition parties are demanding the elections be voided. The National Election Committee, instead of serving as a neutral agency to organize and oversee the elections, has been turned into a tool of the ruling party, the opposition parties claim. The Committee went so far as to declare one of the main opposition candidates, former Vice-president Atiku Abubakar, ineligible. That ruling was overturned by the courts, but only a few days before the presidential elections were scheduled. The National Election Committee has made such a shambles of the election, that in many places people did not get to vote at all. In other places, there were reports of the ballot boxes being carried off by armed men.

Nigeria's President Olusegun Obanjo, a Christian and the leader of the PDP, came to power in 1999, when the country made a relatively peaceful transition from a military dictatorship to democratic rule. However, after serving the two terms allowed by

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Nigeria's central mosque in Abuja

the constitution, he was not about to relinquish power willingly, and he fought to introduce constitutional changes that would

allow him to run for a third term. Failing here, he sought to use the courts to prevent many opposition candidates from running. And in the run-up to the elections, according to a Council on Foreign Relations report, candidates were not only intimidated, but some were kidnapped and a few even assassinated.

After the first round of elections and reports that the PDP was winning almost everywhere, there were a number of protests that turned violent. In the oil-rich delta, mobs of youths set fire to cars and houses. In Kano State, Islamic militants launched an attack against a police station, killing a number of people. They were routed by the Nigerian army

and some 25 killed.

There is a lot more at stake in these elections, however, than the victory of this or that party, this or that political platform. The corruption endemic in the system means that the winner and his clique of supporters get to divide the spoils. And the amount of cash to be milked from the corrupt system is considerable. Bribery and blackmail is endemic from the highest to the lowest. Nigeria is blessed with oil riches, but those riches are also a curse, for, according to the World Bank, as much as 80 percent of this income is siphoned off by those who are well-connected.

See Nigeria on page 2

Turks wary of possible Islamist power play

Yigal Schleifer

ISTANBUL—"Will he or won't he?" That is the question that has gripped Turkey for the last several weeks.

In early May, Turkey's parliament will elect the country's new president—a ceremonial though powerful and highly symbolic position—and the leading candidate is the current prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Although the prime minister holds more power, the presidency is in many ways a more prestigious position. Seen by many Turks as the guardian of the country's secular system, the president can veto laws, appoint key officials, and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Mr. Erdogan has not yet confirmed that he will seek the presidency, but his party, the Islamist-rooted Justice and

Development Party (AKP), has a solid majority in parliament that would guarantee his successful election.

The prospect of the religious-minded AKP controlling both parliament and the presidency, however, has put Turkey's secular establishment, especially the military, on edge and has had led to an outcry from a large segment of the public, which fears that the delicate balance between religion and state in Turkey could be threatened.

Secularist protesters rally
On the April 18

weekend, an estimated 370,000 protesters gathered in Turkey's capital, Ankara, for a rally against the possibility of an Erdogan

See Turkey on page 2



News

World church council, Christian Aid, lead London climate meeting

Geneva, (ENI) – The World Council of Churches is sponsoring a meeting hosted by the British agency Christian Aid in London from April 12 to 15 that will examine options for faith communities' participation in a proposed civil society campaign on climate.

The Geneva-based WCC groups more than 340 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 560 million Christians in over 110 countries.

In a statement on April 10 the WCC said the meeting will examine "what are the implications of climate change for development in a world where years of development efforts are destroyed in a few seconds or hours by a hurricane or a single flood?"

"The consultation is expected to renew and update ecumenical advocacy positions and policy in relation to intergovernmental negotiations on climate change after 2012—the year when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires," said the WCC. "It will also revitalize faith communities' participation in a proposed

global civil society campaign on climate change."

It said, "In reflecting from a theological and ethical perspective on the interface between climate change and development, the consultation will consider Northern societies' responsibilities and how Southern societies can pursue their legitimate development goals. Also on the agenda are readaptation strategies as well as emission reduction targets and timetables."

The meeting will hear about plans for a global civil society campaign on climate change that environmental organizations together with faith communities intend to launch later during 2007.

The participating organizations are: Bread for the World/Church Development Service (Germany), Christian Aid (Britain), Church of Sweden Aid, Church World Service (USA), Evangelical Environment Network (USA), ICCO/Kerkinactie (The Netherlands), KairosCanada Norwegian Church Aid, Tearfund (Britain) and the

Nigeria *continued*

A report by the Council on Foreign Relations stresses the importance of Nigeria, not just to the West for its oil, but to all of Africa. "If Nigeria works well, so might Africa. If the democratic experiment in Nigeria stalls, and development and governance stagnate, the rest of Africa suffers and loses hope."

Election failure will likely mean increased violence in the oil-rich delta in the south as well as in some northern states.

The presidential candidate for the ruling PDP, picked by Obasanjo to replace him, is Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a 56-year-old former chemistry teacher, often described as uncharismatic and sickly. Many commentators see him as little more than a puppet, leaving Obasanjo as the real power behind the scenes. Atiku Abubakar, Obasanjo's former vice-president and now a hostile opponent has been accused of siphoning off millions. These accusations were perhaps brought to prevent him from running, but that doesn't mean they weren't true.

Another major contender is Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigeria Peoples Party. A retired general and former military dictator, Buhari is an Islamic hardliner who has strong support in the Muslim north.

According to the Pew Survey, although



Olusgun Obasanjo at mike

there have been local explosions of Muslim-Christian conflict, often exacerbated by ethnic rivalries, these have been mostly contained and play no huge role in the elections. Twelve northern states have adopted sharia, but this has not become a national election issue.

Peter Lewis, director of the Council for African Studies at the American University in Washington, said this could be the defining moment for Nigeria's democracy. "If the election is badly flawed and very turbulent," he said, "I think that the confidence of many people will be shaken and people will have a considerable insecurity and perhaps even disillusionment about the process and the future of democracy in Nigeria."

Turkey *continued*

presidency. Waving Turkish flags and carrying pictures of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, modern Turkey's secularizing founder, the crowd chanted slogans such as "Turkey is secular and will stay secular" and "We don't want an imam in the presidential palace."

Mehmet Erhun, an Istanbul businessman, and his two uncles made the five-hour drive to Ankara for the rally, the first demonstration he has attended in 30 years.

"I was there to make a message that this guy can be president, but he has to take the pressure off the nation. If he keeps polarizing in terms of secularization, then things can get out of control," says Mr. Erhun.

"In Turkey, the general public is usually silent. We are obedient people, unless things get to a limit. And this is a limit," he adds.

With Erdogan's potential candidacy already causing so much tension, several Turkish analysts have suggested that he step aside and let a more consensual candidate come forward.

"When the country faces so many problems and needs so many reforms, why do we need all this needless polarization?" Says Sahin Alpay, a political scientist at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University.

"We need a candidate that AKP supports, but that also wouldn't antagonize the military-civilian establishment," he said.

Erdogan is a polarizing figure

Though charismatic and popular with his electorate, Erdogan is very much a lightning rod in Turkish politics. While the country's

Modern street in Ankara, Turkey



president is expected to be a kind of elder statesman who sits above the political fray, the straight-shooting Erdogan is seen by many as too deeply involved in party politics to play that kind of role.

Secularists, meanwhile, still remember his efforts a few years ago to make adultery a crime and to rejigger Turkey's educational system to accommodate graduates of religious schools. For many of them, the idea of Erdogan's head-scarfed wife residing in the presidential palace is too much to bear.

"Are you aware of the danger? Clocks

will be turned back 100 years on May 16," the secularist *Cumhuriyet* newspaper recently wrote, referring to the date when the new president will be sworn in.

While not referring specifically to Erdogan, the current president, arch-secularist Ahmet Necdet Sezer, said in a recent speech, "The political regime in Turkey has never faced dangers to that extent since the establishment of the republic."

"For the first time, the pillars of the secular republic are being openly questioned," Mr. Sezer, a former judge, said.

Though often described as a figurehead, the Turkish president is much more than that.

"It has become a guardian position, because it represents the state structure as set up by Ataturk," says Hugh Pope, an Istanbul-based senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, a research and advocacy organization.

For now, Erdogan is keeping his cards close to his chest. A surprise candidate may be put forward, but many experts here believe he will run.

One of the secularists' worries is that once Erdogan is ensconced in the presidential palace, the AKP will use its parliamentary power to create a system where the president has even more power, something the party has talked about doing before.

But legal and political experts believe the way to avoid recurring tension over who is to become president is to actually take away some of the Turkish president's extraordinary powers and restore the position to that of a figurehead.

"The best thing for this country would be to put an end to this strange hybrid form of government where you have a parliament and a very powerful president who is not popularly elected and not accountable to anyone," says Mr. Alpay.

"It doesn't fit in a parliamentary system."

Yigal Schleifer is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor

Politics

The politics of morality

It is difficult nowadays to recall a time when evangelical Christians avoided political activity for fear it would deflect them from preaching the gospel. Decades later we take it for granted that our Christian confession has implications for our life in the world, including politics. Nevertheless the approach taken by most of these groups is flawed insofar as it revolves largely around the so-called moral issues.

The defects of this focus on morality are illustrated by a recent clash between two different groups of evangelicals over controversial speeches on climate change by Richard Cizik, Vice-President of Government Relations for the Washington-based National Association of Evangelicals. In response a group of evangelical leaders, including Dr. James Dobson and Gary Bauer, wrote a letter to the chairman of the board of the NAE, charging that Cizik's focus on climate change unduly "shifts the emphasis away from the great moral issues of our time, notably the sanctity of human life, the integrity of marriage and the teaching of sexual abstinence and morality to our children."

By contrast, other professed evangelicals, such as Sojourners' Jim Wallis and Brian McLaren, affirm that care for the environment, helping the poor and the American military occupation of Iraq are also moral issues. In addressing the congressional budgetary process, Wallis

has written that budgets are "moral documents that reflect the values and priorities of a family, church, organization, city, state, or nation."

Evangelicals claim above all to be *biblical* Christians operating from a high view of scripture as the word of God. This is their undoubted strength, and it has led to phenomenal growth in the evangelical movement in recent decades. However, it is not enough to lift a Bible passage from its larger context and assume that, *by itself*, it can address contemporary political life in any deep and sustained fashion. Much preliminary work must be done to make sense of the normative task of government and then to articulate the implications of this task for various political issues.

In a recent speech urging US congressional leaders to raise the minimum wage, Wallis asserted that "God hates inequality." In the first place, depending on how one defines equality, there are plenty of biblical passages that could be marshalled to refute this statement. Second and more importantly, even if he were to make this slogan more nuanced, arguing instead that God commands us to care for the poor, this itself cannot decide the issue, since there are people on both sides who accept this obligation, yet differ as to whether raising the minimum wage is the best way to fulfil it.



Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

On the other end of the evangelical spectrum, Dobson and others tend to take a patchwork approach to political life, galvanizing their constituencies to fight specific battles over abortion and similar divisive issues as they arise. Unfortunately, they often wind up on the losing side, at least partly because the cultural tide is running against them, but also because their approach is not rooted in a coherent understanding of the proper role of government. They thus end up appearing as mere nay-sayers attempting to obstruct the claimed rights of women, homosexuals and the terminally ill seeking premature release from suffering.

It would be good if both groups could get together to formulate a coherent approach to public affairs – one that goes beyond sloganeering and proof-texting towards fleshing out the divine mandate of government to do public justice. They could still expect to lose battles, but they would also have a sounder basis for making a more credible showing in the larger political debate.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is the author of the award-winning *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity Press).

His weblog can be found at:

<<http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com/>>



Ontario considers proportional representation

Ontario has followed in the footsteps of B.C. to entertain dramatic changes to its way of electing members of parliament by introducing proportional representation (PR). The Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, a group of 103 randomly selected Ontarians, is expected to recommend a hybrid form of it for an October referendum. The hybrid is called mixed-member proportional representation.

The rhetoric is already heating up. *The National Post* has come out in opposition, suggesting that PR was responsible for Hitler's rise to power in Germany as well as for creating governmental gridlock in Israel and Italy. Both main parties, the Conservatives as well as the Liberals, also oppose it, which is only to be expected, since it will diminish their power.

Those in favor of a Christian political party tend to champion PR because it gives recognition and representation to even small parties. In the first-past-the-post system we have now, those who can't muster enough votes in specific ridings to win, get no representation whatsoever. As Andrew Coyne pointed out in *The National Post*, in Quebec the Green Party garnered 660,000 votes without winning a single

seat, while the Bloc got 51 seats with only about twice as many votes.

Those who defend first-past-the-post counter that under this system representatives do not serve a specific ideological group but all the people of a given region. Moreover, they point out, countries with PR are forced to rely on government by coalitions of parties, none of whom is able to win a majority by itself. Such coalitions are, of course, less stable than rule by a single party that has won a majority. Sometimes, too, after an election under the PR system, it can take a long time for parties to form a coalition and a government.

Defenders of PR argue that the need to form a coalition makes negotiation, compromise and cooperation more important. Of course, under the present system that tends to happen under the umbrella of a single party, as different segments within a party push their particular agendas. Under a PR system, for example, would the Alliance and the Conservatives have been motivated to merge into a single party? Similarly, the Liberal party, too, has its wings.

In a PR system worldview and ideological issues probably begin to play a bigger role, while under

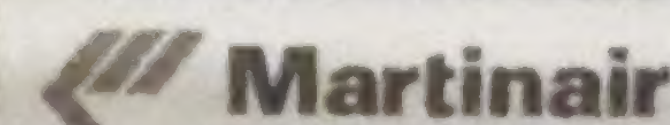
our present system politicians tend to pay more attention to regional interests. However, the system under consideration for Ontario would continue regional representation on a first-past-the-post basis for 90 seats, with only 39 seats to be elected by PR. So out of 129 seats, only 30 percent would be elected by the proportional method.

In a submission to the Citizen's Assembly, David Koyzis pointed out that the present system has flaws in terms of fairness of representation and voter choice, which discourage voter participation and reduce the accountability of politicians to the voters. For 13 years, Koyzis pointed out, the party in power in Ontario had no opposition because of first-past-the-post; as a result accountability suffered badly.

Voter turnout is low in countries with our system because votes cast for small parties seem to be wasted.

To pass, the new system of mixed-member proportional voting will have to win a 60 percent overall Yes vote plus a majority in at least 64 of 103 ridings.

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Editorial

Some words against the darkness

Harry der Nederlanden

I had decided not to write about the Virginia Tech shootings. So many words uttered already. So much media chatter. And the camera always demanding more. An outpouring of sentiments that seemed ludicrously inadequate.

Immediately the event was politicized and turned into a springboard for this or that agenda or idea. For gun control and against it. To excoriate campus security and the failure of law enforcement to remove dangerous people from our midst before they can do any harm. To illustrate the effects of bullying and exclusion. To bring home to us the reality of evil. To point once again to the violence that pervades our society.

Words, words, words. Many of them predictable. Cliches.

To add more words seemed futile, foolish. Perhaps even arrogant.

But my thoughts kept circling back to the tragedy, and words kept forming in my mind, in my ears. The words of others; my own words.

Human beings are by nature creatures that exude words like spiders excrete webs to keep them connected and oriented to the world around.

But why is it that though words can be so painfully inadequate, disappointing, we still keep on exuding them – extending them forward like a hand to steady ourselves? Or perhaps like the cane of a blind man feeling out the topography before him.

Putting down words – writing – is always a dangerous business. As much creating a persona for the writer as it is an honest encounter with reality. Words stop human feeling and thought, delude and distract, as much as they open us up to the truth and set us free. Yes, words themselves are fraught with, caught up in, violence too.

They do not endow us with a safe vantage point outside the broken, suffering, demented, conflict-riddled world but draw us into it. They, too, are a conflict zone. Dangerous.

Those of us who live far from the scene of the tragedy and who know none of the victims are connected to it by nothing more than images and words. Yet, we are made participants. We are human beings, after all, created like

those killed and those grieving the dead, and like the killer himself, in God's image. We all feel something of the shock and the pain. At the same time we know that what we feel is nothing like the knife that has cut the hearts of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, spouses and friends.

Our words falter before such intense grief. They catch in our throats and dissolve. Words, writing or speaking, so quickly become exploitation. Don't these words, too, exploit the suffering and grief of others to transmute them into matter for an editorial?

So it's no wonder that some pastors like Brian McLaren warn us against the dangers of words. He cautions us that our words, our questions may be a quest for "a kind of rational explanation – so that the irrational can be folded into our sense of order in the universe. Often these questions send us on a search for someone to blame – a person, a group, the devil, even God."

He fears that words are equivalent to naming and blaming, to giving our frustration and anger in the face of the irrational a target, for projecting fault.

But before we get caught up in labeling and mobilizing our words and ourselves to find solutions and to fix what is wrong, we need time to suffer. We need to let the reality crash over us.

His words reminded me of the words of Van Ruler's meditation in this issue: we need to risk ourselves against the chaos and the irrationality of this broken, fractured world.

But words don't just serve to label and pin down. They are not in and of themselves dedicated only to mastery. McLaren himself says that we need to "truly feel our feelings and name them; so that we can speak of them and share them and feel an exchange with others of sympathy, empathy, common grief, and common sorrow."

In reaction to those who are too glib with words, too quick to come with formulaic responses, too eager to plug us into their programs for fixing the world, we have fallen into the habit, equally formulaic, of dissing words. We have created a caricature that intimidates almost everyone and keeps them from using words in the presence of suffering and grief.

Yes, such words are awkward, trite, inadequate, and they pale before the reality of death. But we have been given words precisely to oppose death.

Words do serve to engage and to mobilize us. They can inspire and motivate us to do good as well as evil. But we also send out words in our attempts to discover who and what and where we are. We send them out like a bird over the flood waters, over the chaos and the irrationality, looking for a place to light.

We inhale and we exhale words as naturally as we breathe to maintain life. A word is also a breath, an opening up, a gasping for contact, content, for an infusion of the Spirit.

Words are not first of all containers that we use to crate up reality and ship it somewhere for processing. They are probes, prayers, filaments of our very being seeking to make contact with the mystery of that which surrounds us.

Those filaments keep breaking and our probes keep having to be repeated. There is always a gap between our words and the mystery of the creation and the events around us and of the mystery of iniquity that has distorted and mutilated them so badly. Otherwise there would be no need for faith and for trust. Words address our lack and they invite us – no, in the midst of grief, they extort from us – the need for a word, a revelation, a response

from creation and Creator.

At the core of our words, there is a sharp intake of breath, a gasp, a cry for meaning. We need our words to be filled with substance even as we need the symbols – those basic material elements of bread and wine – to be filled with the reality and the promise of his coming. Every word is fractured, torn between the pain of naming the broken reality that is and the joy of naming the reality that is and that is not yet but which is rushing in to fill our mouths, our hearts, our lives and even our cliches, rituals and institutions with divine newness.

God did not leave us to spin our own words into the darkness, to construct word towers amidst the swirling flood waters. He incarnated the most intimate words of his heart and let them be born in the midst of our grief, our chaos our irrational, broken world. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He became acquainted with our grief, and he was broken in ways we cannot begin to fathom.

And as he dwelt with us, he spoke to us and with us. We are not left with just our own words. When we cry and when we groan, we are told by God himself, *that is the Spirit, the Spirit of God and of our Mediator, crying and groaning within us.* And it is not just a cry of pain and of despair, but it is a cry of hope and of expectation. We feel the brokenness, the injustice and the violence of this world because we are acquainted with something better.

There is something new coming to birth within and among us – and it is dying to burst forth into words. Like the seeds in the ground are springing forth in response to the warmth of the sun and the promise of light.

My and your suffering and grief are unique, but they are communicable and they are shared because we share in God's nature and are upheld by his word. To be intimidated into silence, as if death and grief isolates us irrevocably from one another, is to grant a victory to darkness.

How a human mind can become so twisted, tormented and cut off from reality that it becomes captive to terror and violence we'll never fully understand. Yes, it is undoubtedly part of sin and evil, but it is both more and different than any evil that can be ascribed to this mentally disturbed individual. His act was not his own. He too, was overcome by an evil and violence beyond his comprehension.

If we do not speak the words we have been given, we too are in danger of becoming encapsulated in a world of darkness and death. At bottom, all our words are invocations of the healing and wholeness that will one day drive away all the darkness and the madness.

As surely as the sun rises each morning and sends out light over the earth to warm it and rouse it, Lord, so shed your light over us and into us and let it renew us all.

As surely as the air moves over the hills, the trees, the fields and the cities to give breath to all, send your Spirit to move among us, to fill our empty hearts, our fragile words, and our aching lives with hope, with healing, with the sure knowledge that you are making all things new.

As surely as Jesus the Christ rose from the violence and suffering of the cross and from the darkness of the grave, you free us from the tentacles of all that brings despair and death. Breathe your word into us that we may live together in harmony, walking gladly in your ways and rejoicing together at every sign of the new life that is coming.

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

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Letters/Opinion

The Muslim Brotherhood: In the shadow of the Koran (I)

Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our hope.
(Muslim Brotherhood)

Concerning the polytheists and the hypocrites, it was commanded in this chapter that Jihaad be declared against them and that they be treated harshly.
(Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*)

Harry Antonides

One of the challenges facing all students of Islam is to sort out the many different shades of Islam that have emerged since its founding under the charismatic leadership of the Prophet Muhammad in the year 622 in Medina, in what is now Saudi Arabia.

That history includes rapid territorial expansion in the first one hundred years, severe internal conflicts, the formation of two major branches with numerous subdivisions, and a series of setbacks and decline in the past 400 years.

After World War II, Islam experienced a revival of militancy as it attempted to face the overwhelming forces of modernity. This revival was powerfully aided by the demise of the Western colonial overlords and the simultaneous flow of hundreds of billions of dollars to the Islamic oil-producing countries. The renewed militancy is directed especially at the Western democracies and the Jewish state established in 1948.

The volume of literature produced by Muslim as well as non-Muslim authors, now expanded and speeded up via the Internet, is massive and wide-ranging. What adds to the challenge is that these sources represent a wide range of viewpoints, often diametrically opposed. What really complicates matters is that the language and concepts of fundamentalist Muslims are very different from those steeped in the Western notion of freedom, truth and logic.

There are many compelling reasons why we should try very hard to understand that difference. In the following two articles I want to attempt to do that by taking a careful look at one of the major organizations that has been spearheading militant, that is, jihadist Islam: the Muslim Brotherhood.

This Brotherhood has gained a lot of experience in waging jihad during its nearly 80 years of turbulent existence. It has also learned a lot of lessons in operating in the "shadow" of the openness and freedom within the Western democracies.

An incubator of Jihad

In 1928 the Egyptian schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood, dedicated to the spread of Islamic orthodoxy. It began when six men paid al-Banna a surprise visit and demanded that he become their leader. This is part of the pledge they made, expressing a deeply held conviction that has marked the Brotherhood during its entire history:

We despise this life, which is one of dishonor and enslavement. Arabs and Muslims no



Sayyid Qutb in America in 1946

longer have a place here in this country, nor do they enjoy any dignity. And they do nothing about their state of bondage as wage earners working for foreigners.

As for us, we have nothing to offer but our blood, which circulates in our veins with boiling rage. We have nothing but our souls, which sparkle with faith and dignity....

We do not know how to serve the fatherland, the faith and the Muslim Ummah. Thou hast the answer....

Thou shalt be responsible for us and our actions, responsible for an entire community of devoted [fighters] which takes an oath in front of Allah to live only according to his religion and to die for him.... (Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror*, 1987, p. 45)

What these men had in mind with their passionate statement of belief and commitment was to devote their lives to a cause that was bigger than them. They were dedicating themselves to stand against the laxness and defeatism among Muslim believers; and externally, against the colonial regimes, especially Britain. The Brotherhood's founding took place only four years after the abolition of the rule by Islamic clergy (caliphate) in Turkey under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk. (Osama bin Laden has described that event as a grievous insult that he listed as a motive for his declaration of war on the West.)

Al-Banna lamented the end of the caliphate as a separation of "the state from religion in a country [Turkey] which was until recently the site of the Commander of the Faithful." He saw this as part of a "Western invasion, which was armed and equipped with all [the] destructive influences of money, wealth, prestige, ostentation, power, and means of Propaganda." He summarized the Brotherhood's worldwide ambition as follows:

*...it is a duty incumbent on every Muslim to struggle towards the aim of making every people Muslim and the whole world Islamic, so that the banner of Islam can flutter over the earth and the call of the Muezzin can resound in all the corners of the world: God is greatest [Allahu akbar]! (Quoted in Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers*, pp. 217, 218)*

Consequently, the Muslim Brotherhood set out to reverse the trend of secularization and made the spread of sharia law the purpose of its existence. At first Al-Banna chose the route of peaceful opposition by debate and persuasion. But after absorbing the teachings

and examples of other Muslim leaders who preached a message of violence and murder, in 1938 he declared that Islamic rule in Egypt must be established "by force if necessary." He also began forming an "alternative administration" that would in time take over the government and wage war "against 'the heathen, the apostate, the deviant,' who would, when judged too dangerous, be put to death in the name of Allah." (Taheri, p.51)

In the 1940s the Brotherhood began a campaign of terror and assassinations that became a model for Muslim organization in other countries. Many came from the surrounding countries to learn the deadly art of murder and mayhem. Mass arrests followed and Al-Banna was executed in January 1949, though his writings are still in circulation and continue to inspire those who long for the worldwide caliphate.

The following decades saw more violence and death, which led to the Brotherhood's being banned in Egypt for a number of years, but its offspring is now active in many other countries as well.

The father of militant Islam

The second influential leader of the Brotherhood was Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) who has been called "the father of modern [Islamic] fundamentalism." He studied in the U.S. from 1948 till 1950, where he acquired a strong aversion to what he perceived to be the moral degeneration of that country. After his return to Egypt, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, and he served in the Ministry of Education from which he was dismissed in 1952. (He is considered to be the main inspiration for the ideas of Osama bin Laden, who was a student of Sayyid's brother Muhammad Qutb, professor of Islamic studies.)

Though imprisoned from 1954-1964 and executed by the Egyptian government in 1966, he developed a huge following as a result of his involvement in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in opposition to the government in power. Even more important is the legacy of his voluminous writings.

A moral imperative

The April 2 issue contained an article by Mr. Maynard van der Galien. In it he contends that the Great (Irish Potato) Famine was an artificial famine – it was engineered by rapacious English absentee landlords. Mr. van der Galien goes on to say that "it happens even today in countries with evil regimes."

It does indeed. Think of Russia depriving Chechnia. North Korea foregoing butter to buy bazookas. To say nothing of all those corruption-riddled African regimes!

However, I can't help feeling that the essentially identical scenario is being played out in North America. I am referring to the increasing practice of converting corn into ethanol. While thousands are starving, we take a precious food-source and turn it into a commodity to feed our rapacious automobiles.

It seems to me that the well-fed Christian minority has been strangely silent about this issue. The only voices of concern that I am aware of have come from the "left." I did read a related article in the *Grand Rapids Press*. It was a study done by a Calvin College professor on the cost-benefit of ethanol.

I am convinced that there is a moral imperative here that we can no longer ignore. **Justice** demands it.

Lippe Catharinus de Haan
Exeter, Ontario

They include a 30-volume commentary on the Koran (*In the Shadow of the Koran* – of which a 15-volume English translation is in progress) and his *Signposts on the Way*, also called *Milestones*. The latter is a passionately written argument for the elimination of all man-made laws to be replaced by the worldwide rule of Islamic law.

In chapter 4 of *Milestones*, "Jihad: the Cause of God," Qutb describes the various stages of Islamic progress. Here he discusses the notion of freedom in the Koran as stipulated in Sura 2:256: "There is no compulsion in religion." But in trying to balance the idea of freedom with the absolute claims of divine

See *Brotherhood* on page 6

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Opinion

A personal tribute to June Callwood

Gerald Vandezande, C.M.

The Sunday issue of the Toronto Star carried a front-page headline "Saint June" which described our friend and co-worker June Callwood as "a tireless advocate for social justice." It rightly declared that "journalist June Callwood left an indelible mark on the city." (April 15, 2007)

Anne Dublin, who wrote a Callwood biography for young readers, said, "June saw the brokenness and despair that was evident in many people's lives. She decided that she had to repair the world."

"But behind the successful, feisty public woman was someone who had suffered a great deal. She never liked that term 'Saint June'. She was the first to admit that she wasn't perfect, and would often laugh about her mistakes and failings."

As Barbara Turnbull, a friend and a Star reporter wrote, when you boil it down, she really only had one message: a little kindness goes a long way. For June that "little bit of kindness went very far indeed, resulting in the creating of more than 50 charities and organizations, and in thousands of other ways."

Turnbull pointedly wrote: "For all her reasons to embrace life and dip into the bottomless font of kindness, she was equally forthright in regards to the one challenge that had her beat – the loss of her son Casey, cut down at an inexcusably young age by a drunk driver."

"Death is easy," she said. "Losing a child is the worst thing that can possibly happen to someone."

Developer and philanthropist Murray Frum, recalling Callwood's support for a children's mental health program established by Frum's late wife, CBC Broadcaster Barbara Frum, said: "[Callwood] was a believer but she wasn't a passive believer. She was an active believer. She was more than a



writer-chronicler. That was just something she did for a living. She was a person who wanted to make things happen."

Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld of Temple Emanu-El served as co-chair for much of the past 10 years with Callwood on the Campaign Against Child Poverty.

"Her life was totally committed to giving all children an equal chance at life," Bielfeld said. "Especially this last decade of her life was committed in helping to influence public policy ... to try to help to eradicate child poverty, certainly to reduce it as much as it can be."

Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty, who recently visited Callwood in hospital, praised her as "a great force for social justice in Ontario."

John Tory, leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives, saluted Callwood as "the conscience of Ontario society."

Ontario NDP Leader Howard Hampton, said Callwood, instead of telling governments what to do, "went out and did it herself.... She fought for equality, preached courage and she pulled no punches."

Indeed, as I can testify, over the years and on many different occasions, June spoke her mind forthrightly, and, together with others, she courageously challenged then-finance minister Paul Martin, his successors and their Ontario counterparts to keep their political promises and deliver fiscal measures that would address the economic and social needs of vulnerable citizens – such as child and family poverty, homelessness and hunger.

June certainly was passionate about human-rights issues and social injustices to the last, always deeply concerned about the well-being of the growing number of marginalized individuals and groups in our society.

I continue to cherish her willingness to engage in open-hearted discussion. At one key meeting, we discussed what we should do to persuade the management and shareholders of a powerful multinational to change its corporate goals and business practices to contribute to the common good. In her candid way, June suddenly said, "Gerald, you believe

in God, don't you?"

I responded: "Why do you think so?"

She replied, "Because you believe people even managers – can change their values and views, their corporate policies and business practices!"

June had her doubts, but she also agreed to give my particular faith-based approach a fair chance.

During a personal follow-up discussion, we had a fruitful dialogue about the urgent need for fundamental change and public-justice steps that contribute to a more stewardly economy and equitable corporate and government principles that help build a mutually respectful and responsible society.

Former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson described June Callwood as follows: "She was one of the most remarkable women of the 20th century and we're blessed to have known her."

From my own personal experience and perspective, I would add: June was a principled advocate, deeply motivated by deep conviction with a warm heart and genuine humour. I enjoyed working with her, particularly in the Campaign Against Child Poverty. While we sometimes had minor disagreements about political priorities and media strategy, I fully agree with June Callwood when she expressed her core conviction: "If any of you happens to see an injustice, you are no longer a spectator, you are a participant. And you have an obligation to do something."

June's provocative assertion reminds me of the comment by the apostle James on faith and deeds: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:14-17)

Gerald Vandezande is the retired National Public Affairs Director of the Citizens for Public Justice, a co-founding member of the Campaign Against Child Poverty and one of its Steering Committee's volunteer spokespersons.

Brotherhood continued from page 5

authority of the Koran, he seems to assume that if the followers of Allah provide the right environment of universal Islamic rule, everyone will voluntarily submit.

However, until such perfect conditions materialize, presumably by persuasion and discussion, the enemies of Islam must be dealt with. Qutb leaves no doubt as to which approach has to be used. After quoting Sura 2: 256, he writes that Jihad in Islam on the other hand,

tries to annihilate all those political and material powers which stand between people and Islam, which force one people to bow before another people and prevent them from accepting the sovereignty of God. These two principles [human freedom v. divine sovereignty] have no relation to one another nor is there room to mix them.... The Islamic Jihaad has no relationship to modern warfare, either in its causes or in the way it is conducted. The causes of Islamic Jihaad should be sought in the very nature of Islam and its role in the world, in its high principles, which have been given to it by God and for the implementation of which God appointed the Prophet – peace be on him – as his Messenger and declared him to be the last of all prophets and messengers.

Qutb continues in this vein, explaining that Islam amounts to a universal declaration of the freedom of all mankind (not just Arabs and Muslims) from servitude to other men and to his own desires. In contrast, any other system in which humans are seen as the final authorities deifies humans and thereby become usurpers of the authority of God.

He writes that because Islam teaches the freedom of man from all authority except that of God, it is faced in

every period with obstacles and opposition of many kinds, it must first of all deal with the obstacles of political power. Thus Islam strives from the beginning to abolish all those systems and governments based on man-made rules, which, according to Qutb, are by definition a form of slavery.

Qutb deals in detail with the different methods and timing of Jihad. In a logic that for many will be hard to follow he argues that in an "Islamic system there is room for all kinds of people to follow their own beliefs, while obeying the laws of the country which are themselves based on the Divine authority." You can be sure that the defenders of radical Islam will readily quote the first part of the last sentence, but the real meaning lies in the last part.

The Bible v. the Koran

Again and again Qutb returns to his overarching concept of the absolute authority of God and how that in fact is the source of human freedom. There is an odd surface similarity here with what the Bible teaches about this topic, but there is a world of difference between the two religions.

The Bible also teaches that God is the sovereign authority and sustainer of all that exists. Secondly, it furthermore teaches that true human freedom is found in surrendering our lives to his service. But the difference is like that between day and night, or light and darkness.

This is a topic that needs far more commentary, but let me here try to give a brief summary of the difference between the teachings of the Koran and the Bible about the central issue of human freedom. The main difference lies in what the Koran and the Bible teach about divine love and compassion.

The love of God is revealed first of all in that Christ came to save the world and reconciled us sinful human beings to a holy God, by giving his life as a ransom for our sins. Consequently, salvation and true human freedom is a gift of God's grace, which is open to all people. Now we are called to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus teaches that we are even to love our enemies and to pray for them.

In the Koran, as interpreted by Qutb and likeminded teachers, God is depicted as a hard, unpredictable taskmaster, who can only be pacified by having our good deeds outnumber our bad ones. The same teachers tell us that the main struggle in life is to establish Islamic rule worldwide. Those who refuse are considered unworthy, unclean, infidels, destined for hell. Depending on circumstances, they are declared to be second-class citizens (dhimmis), to be persecuted, and sometimes killed in the name of Allah.

There is also a fundamental difference in the way society ought to be organized. The Bible teaches principles and guidelines for all human relations and social structures, summarized in the call to love God and our neighbors. There has evolved within Christianity over the centuries certain insights with respect to the different roles and authorities of the various social structures. This has led to the recognition that the boundary between the public and private spheres must be respected. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and the God what is God's." Behind this recognition lies the fundamental freedom of conscience and belief.

The contrast with Islam could not be more acute. It teaches that Islamic law, that is, law based on the Koran

Stewardship

Brotherhood

continued
and the Hadith, contains all of the instructions for the proper conduct of politics and all others areas of life. There is no separation between the mosque and the state, but the supreme authority for every aspect of life rightly belongs to experts in Islamic law. This is the establishment of a theocracy in which there is no freedom of religion – and therefore no freedom at all. In fact, where sharia law dominates there is a death penalty on renouncing the Islamic faith.

Thinking sanely about deep things

If we want to understand the character of radical Islam, the life and works of Sayyid Qutb are a good place to start. They will help us to understand the appeal of his message to millions of Muslims. They will also help us to fathom the true nature of the war declared on us, and thereby rid us of any illusions about the dangers ahead.

It is the responsibility of all who treasure freedom, especially Christians, to gauge correctly the spiritual forces at work here. To that end we might benefit from the observations by someone who has seriously struggled to understand the significance of Qutb's life and message.

Paul Berman wrote a lengthy essay in the *New York Times Magazine* of March 23, 2003, with the revealing title "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror," which he concludes with a challenge that should speak with special force to Christian leaders and thinkers.

Berman struggled to get into the minds of the followers of Qutb, who are inspired to suffer any hardship and even face death themselves and kill others in the name of Allah. This is how he describes the followers of this prophet of the Koran:

These people are in possession of a powerful philosophy, which is Sayyid Qutb's. They are in possession of a gigantic work of literature, which is his "In the Shade of the Qur'an".... They feel that, with an intense study of the Koran, as directed by Qutb and his fellow thinkers, they can make sense of thousands of years of theological error. They feel that, in Qutb's notion of shariah, they command the principles of a perfect society.... They feel they are benefiting the world, even if they are committing random massacres.

The terrorists speak insanely of deep things. The antiterrorists had better speak sanely of equally deep things. Presidents will not do this. Presidents will dispatch armies, or decline to dispatch armies, for better and for worse.

But who will speak of the sacred and the secular, of the physical world and the spiritual world? Who will defend liberal ideas against the enemies of liberal ideas? Who will defend liberal principles in spite of liberal society's every failure? President George W. Bush in his speech to Congress a few days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attack announced that he was going to wage a war of ideas. He has done no such thing. He is not the man for that.

Philosophers and religious leaders will have to do this on their own. Are they doing so? Armies are in motion, but are the philosophers and religious leaders, the liberal thinkers, likewise in motion? There is something to worry about here, an aspect of the war that liberal society seems to have trouble understanding – one more worry, on top of all the others, and possibly the greatest worry of all.

(To be continued)

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Jubilee stewardship

Usually when we think of a "jubilee", we think of a celebration like a Jubilee Anniversary (celebrating 50 years). The word "Jubilee" is associated with celebration and festivity and is certainly not something that we would normally associate closely with stewardship. Typically, when we think of stewardship, it is associated with duties, responsibilities and our stuff. What is the point of joining festivity with responsibility? I believe that it's about loosening our grip on our stuff and celebrating what God provides!

In the Bible, the Israelites were taught to practice the Year of Jubilee – a Sabbath of Sabbaths every 50th year. You can read more about this and the detailed instructions laid down by Moses to the Israelites in Leviticus 25.

One important aspect of the Year of Jubilee is the requirement to return any land or home (in the case of the Levites) that had been sold since the last Jubilee to the original family or clan to whom Moses had assigned it. In this way, God provided an economic leveling system that prevented any one Israelite from becoming an overly-large landowner who could dominate or control large areas of land. By design, this also limited indebtedness among the Israelites, as the value of any land was limited to the value of the crops that the land could produce until the next Year of Jubilee.

"If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. You are to buy from your countryman on the basis of the number of years since the jubilee. And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops." Lev. 25:14-15

Compare that to what is happening today in Canada. Currently, land speculation for development in many regions in Canada has driven up the price of farmland so that a farmer cannot afford to buy land and make enough income to even cover the interest cost of borrowing. It simply makes no economic sense to buy land for farming at today's prices.

For the Year of Jubilee, God made a promise to his people to be a God who provides – if they remained faithful to him. God wanted his people to celebrate his provision (Jubilee Stewardship). Having a Year of Jubilee meant that no crops were planted. This meant that the people had to trust in God's provision; they relied on the crops produced in the previous year and on whatever crops the land produced on its own during the Year of Jubilee.

God, through Moses, promised his people that there would be an abundant harvest in the year before the Sabbath or Jubilee year so that they would have enough food until the harvest time of the year following the Year of Sabbath or Jubilee. God's promise was contingent on their trust, a trust which closely paralleled the Israelite's experience in the desert, when God provided a double collection of manna on the sixth day that would not spoil so that the seventh or Sabbath day could be honored as a day of rest. God looks for trust by his people that he will provide for them so that the people would rest in him.

So what about us? How can we experience "Jubilee Stewardship" – since we do not practice the teachings of Leviticus? Though the practice of Jubilee is no longer followed, there are some principles that we can (and should) apply to our daily lives.

It begins with having the right attitude towards our possessions and our responsibilities. Knowing that all that we have is the Lord's is the first step. We need to reduce our anxiety and concern about our stuff knowing that God provides what we need – not necessarily what we want. We can do that by regularly taking

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

some time to consider all that God has entrusted to us. We do well to recognize our responsibility and, at the same time, get a sense of privilege. Instead of evaluating and comparing ourselves to others, we develop the posture that acknowledges all that God has entrusted to our use and care (stewardship) and then, instead of being burdened by it, we celebrate the privilege we have of serving in his Kingdom work. This is the attitude that reflects what I've termed Jubilee Stewardship!

There are other aspects of the biblical teaching on Jubilee that we would do well to observe. Farmers know that crop rotation, green manuring and allowing the land to lay fallow on a regular basis are good management practices that help to maintain good soil health. Similarly, we would do well to look at the busyness of our own lives and to build in time for Sabbath rest and, maybe every seventh year, take some time to retreat and reflect with the intent to re-commission our goals in all of life's endeavors – especially for the Kingdom of God.

Most of all, Jubilee Stewardship is about having a grateful perspective, about having a celebrative, grateful attitude that acknowledges God's provision. It's a healthy perspective on our stuff that will cause us to loosen our grip and reduce our anxiety. It sets us up to be more willing to give and forgive – especially when we appreciate more fully what Christ has done so that we might have Jubilee from our sins!

Stewardly Tip: Personal Covenant. Take a sheet of paper. Divide it into 4 pieces and label the pieces as follows:

<u>Time</u>	
<u>Talents</u>	(skills, aptitudes)
<u>Trees</u>	(home, farm, business) and
<u>Treasures</u>	(money and possessions)

First, take some time to list all that God has entrusted to you in each of these categories. In prayer, hand over these responsibilities over to Jesus – for his Lordship. Then, consider what you would like to develop/set aside/assign as an offering (i.e., time to grow spiritually) to God's kingdom ministry. Covenant it over to Jesus as well in prayer and ask for his support to make it happen.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Stagnant Waters

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Church

Armenian church wants Christian symbols restored in Turkey

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw (ENI) — Leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Turkey have asked to be allowed to install a cross and conduct services at a newly restored church, which was abandoned during the 1915 mass killing of ethnic Armenians.

"A cross can be clearly seen on the church's copula in all old photographs," Patriarch Mesrob II Mutafyan said in a letter to Turkey's culture and tourism ministry. "This is why I am seeking consent to place an iron cross, funded by our community, in its original place, and to be able to conduct a liturgy here once a year."

Work on the 10th century Holy Cross church on Akdamar Island in Lake Van, eastern Anatolia, was completed in late March at a cost of 1.5 million euros by the Turkish government, which initiated the restoration at European Union urging in 2005.

The reopening ceremony was attended on March 29 by the Turkish culture minister, Atilla Koc, and his Armenian counterpart, Gagik Gyurjyan, as well as by foreign diplomats and Patriarch Mesrob, the Istanbul-based head of Turkey's 60,000-strong Armenian Apostolic

community, which follows the Oriental Orthodox tradition.

It was, however, boycotted by Armenian-based Catholicos Karekin II, who rejected a Turkish government invitation after complaining the reopened church would be used as a "museum rather than for liturgical purposes."

"This action by Turkey's authorities against the virtuous Christian feelings of the Armenian people cannot be regarded as a positive step towards rapprochement," the church's Etchmiadzin See said in a statement. "This is especially regrettable in the context of the present universal pursuit of a dialogue of religions and cultures, and partnership among peoples."

Ties between Turkey and Armenia, which have no official diplomatic links, deteriorated during the early 1990s war in Nagorno-Karabakh and have worsened over Turkey's refusal to acknowledge the mass killing of 1.5 million Armenians during the First World War. Actions which resulted in the death of hundreds of bishops, priests and nuns from Armenia's Christian churches, were a systematic genocide, says Armenia.



Mother Cathedral of the Armenian Church in the holy city of Etchmiadzin

Armenia's diaspora funds a religious revival

Armenians from all over the world are hoping to revive a church decimated by decades of communist rule.

Nicole Itano | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Lake Sevan, ARMENIA—On a windswept peninsula that juts out into the blue-black waters of Lake Sevan, the ancient meets modern. Cassock-clad young seminarians wander through a sparkling new building wired for the 21st century and outfitted with a contemporary gym.

But the traditions here are among Christianity's oldest. In the corridor, between classes at Vaskenian Theological Academy, two students stop and bow to a bearded man with a large silver cross around his neck.

"Father, bless us," they say, each putting a hand to their hearts.

"God will bless you," replies Father Minas Martirossian, the school's deputy dean, who is helping to train a new generation of Armenian priests to repopulate the country's depleted ranks.

Just a decade ago, the Armenian Apostolic Church was struggling to survive at home after decades of communist oppression. Today, the Church is undergoing a rebirth fueled by tens of millions of dollars from the global Armenian diaspora.

"The first years were really difficult," recalls Mr. Martirossian, a former mathematics professor who helped restart the seminary in 1990 as the Soviet Union was crumbling and Armenia moved toward independence. "There was no electricity, no heating, no proper food for students. It wasn't just the seminary. It was the whole country."

Underdeveloped, politically isolated, and partially devastated by a still unresolved

war with its neighbor Azerbaijan that raged between 1988 and 1994 as the Soviet Union collapsed, Armenia depends heavily on support from its ethnic diaspora. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into the country to do everything from rebuild roads to renovate water systems to feed orphans.

A little help from Armenia's friends

But perhaps nowhere has diaspora money played a more visible role than in the Armenian Church, which has been central to Armenian culture for centuries.

Armenia first adopted Christianity in AD 301 and claims to be the world's oldest Christian nation.

But under communist rule, religious life there was pushed into the shadows. Churches were seized and shuttered, priests persecuted and many baptisms were conducted in secret. By the time Communism collapsed in 1991, only about 150 priests still remained to serve a population of about 3 million people, largely because of government restrictions on the number of new priests who could be trained.

The situation abroad was very different. Although the church played a pivotal role in cultural life for the approximately 7 million Armenians scattered around the world — primarily in America, Russia, and the Middle East — during the Soviet period, the practical influence of the mother church, located in the Armenian city of Etchmiadzin, and its highest religious leader, the Catholicos of All Armenians, waned.

"The Church's primary responsibility is to lead people to God, but for many years the Armenian church has had a second burden, the

protection of Armenianness," says Father Ktrij Devejian, a Armenian-American architect from Fresno, Calif., who in 2004 became the first American-born priest ordained in Etchmiadzin. "In the diaspora, the Church was involved in every aspect of life."

Now, Armenians outside the country are helping to rebuild the church at home. In the past seven years, diasporans have donated at least \$50 million for construction and fund 85 percent of the Church's overall operating expenses.

Across the country, 52 new churches — and a giant new cathedral — were constructed, and 31 have been renovated. Five more are under construction and 10 more are being renovated.

Today, Devejian — who returned to Armenia at the current Catholicos' request to help build the Church's international connections — marvels at the dramatic rebuilding and expansion underway at Etchmiadzin, the Church's historic headquarters. There's a large, bustling seminary, a new administration building, museum, and baptistery. And the original residence of the Catholicos is being renovated.

"Etchmiadzin hasn't seen a building boom like this in maybe 400 years," says Devejian. "There isn't a building in Armenia under the authority of Etchmiadzin that hasn't been built with diaspora money."

'The difference today is freedom'

The revival of a seminary at Lake Sevan is representative of a broader revitalization of the Armenian church in its birthplace. Under Soviet rule, the monastery there was shut down

after more than a millennium in existence.

In 1990, the peninsula was returned to the church. A few dozen Armenian students and teachers from New Jersey, including Father Minas, moved to the site to reintroduce religious instruction and a clergy. At first, they lived and worked in a single, unheated building.

Six years later, a wealthy Armenian from Damascus funded the construction of a new seminary building and small church.

Today the seminary houses 72 students and has helped double the number of priests in Armenia to more than 400. For the first time in many decades, Armenia is once again beginning to export priests to the diaspora.

But Devejian admits there is still much work to be done to convince Armenians inside the country to return to the church's fold — particularly those raised under Soviet rule.

Many of those being baptized today are adults, but Armenia's churches are still full of old women and young people born after the end of communism. Many Armenians raised under communist rule see no reason to abandon their secularism.

"The Soviets did a very good job of destroying the role of the church as part of society," says Devejian, noting that Catholicos' main priority is to rebuild parish life by rebuilding churches and returning priests to communities.

David Mangasaryan, a 21-year-old priest-in-training at Lake Sevan, is optimistic that Armenians will return to the church.

"The difference today is freedom," says Mr. Mangasaryan. "Our generation is free. We can choose our God and we can choose our religion."

Church

Survey shows rapid drop in Britain's church-goers

London (ENI) – The number of people in Britain going to church is falling rapidly and only one in 10 adults attends church weekly even though 53 percent of adults or 26.2 million people in the United Kingdom identify themselves as Christian.

A survey, "Churchgoing in the UK Today", by Christian relief and development agency Tearfund, said this reflects a drop of 20 percent in weekly church attendance from a similar survey conducted six years ago. The survey shows that 7.6 million adults go to church each month. One in four (12.6 million) attend at least once a year.

The survey report, however, said it also shows that 3 million people who have stopped going to church or who have never been in their lives, would consider attending given the right invitation. The survey polled 7,000 adults. The total population of the United Kingdom is estimated to be 60 million.

Christianity is "still the predominant faith in Britain", the survey found, with more than half of all adults, claiming to be Christian; while other faiths account for 3.2

million adults (or six percent). Three out of five people in the population are affiliated with faith. The remainder, constituting about 39 percent, claim to have no religion.

"The report emphasises the need for Christians to be open to their communities, to develop genuine friendships and to build bridges that will make the church a more inviting home for those who are seeking," Pastor Don McFarlane, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK and Ireland, was quoted as saying in a comment on the report.

Tearfund's president, Elaine Storkey, quoted in the report, told BBC Radio Five Live, "The church for a lot of people is a very strange place these days. They're not familiar with what's going on inside the building, with the form of service, with the way people gather, with what they say, how they pray."

The survey also shows Christianity in Britain today has a multicultural face with nearly 1 million adults attending ethnic majority churches. Regular churchgoing is

particularly high among adults of black ethnic origin at 48 percent – more than three times the proportion among white adults (15 percent). The denominations with the largest number of ethnic majority worshippers are Pentecostal (23 percent), Roman Catholic (23 percent) and Church of England/Anglican (19 percent).

The survey finds that the "biggest challenge remains people opting out of religion altogether". Two thirds of those surveyed (66 percent) or 32.2 million people "have no connection with church at present (or with any other religion)," the report states.

Still, Matthew Frost, chief executive of Tearfund, said: "What is clear from this survey is that the UK is holding firmly to the Christian faith. This is a great encouragement to Tearfund – we tackle poverty and injustice in partnership with churches in some of the world's poorest communities and we could not do it without the volunteers, prayer and money from churches throughout the UK supporting other churches around the world in the fight against poverty."

Tearfund: www.tearfund.org/

Easter tense for Christians in Pakistan following riot Muhammad birthday procession turns violent over 'blasphemy' rumors.

ISTANBUL (Compass Direct News) – Pakistani Muslim and Christian leaders are working to defuse tensions in a Punjab city after rumors of "blasphemy" sparked mob action against the Christian community this week.

Celebrants of Muhammad's Birthday in Toba Tek Singh turned violent Sunday, April 1 in response to false claims that Christian men had attacked Muslims and desecrated a sticker bearing Muhammad's name, local Christians said.

Muhammad Farhan Latif, a National Assembly representative from Toba Tek Singh, told Compass that his local staff worried about recurring violence.

"Sometimes people try to escalate the situation, so they want my help also to intervene and try to cool them down," said Latif, who plans to spend the next three days in Toba Tek Singh mediating the conflict.

Local Christian leaders, including Faisalabad Catholic Bishop Joseph Coutts and Catholic priest Father Bonnie Mendes, met with government officials in an effort to disprove the "blasphemy" rumors.

Police were watching Toba Tek Singh churches as Christians celebrated Easter.

"About 5 percent of Christians left their houses due to danger," said Sharing Life Ministries Pakistan (SLMP), a Christian non-governmental organization. "Police are there to secure the rest of the Christians, but the Christian people don't trust the local police."

Approximately 2,000 Muslims attacked Christian Colony, a Christian neighborhood, on Sunday afternoon, stoning houses and attacking Christian men, women and children, SLMP reported. Another Christian source confirmed the details of the attack but limited the number of attackers to 80, only a small percentage of the entire procession.

"Christians ran to save their lives, and some of them hid themselves in their houses, but even then the Muslim extremists kept on stoning," one local Christian told SLMP. She said that "dozens" of Christians had been injured. A handicapped Christian named Ratan Masih was unable to flee the mob and was badly beaten.



Witnesses said local police conducted a baton charge to free Masih and then took the injured man to the police station, where he received first aid. Masih was later admitted to the city's Civil Hospital.

Christians accused

Accused of committing "blasphemy" against Muhammad and triggering anti-Christian violence, four Christians have gone into hid-

"Martha, Martha...you are overanxious..."

John Bolt

The Mary and Martha story (Luke 10:38-42) has new traction these days as a proof-text for feminist educational activism – "out of the kitchen and into the academy" – but this is not how the tradition has understood it. On the contrary, the key point is not so much that Mary, the woman, has a mind and should be doing more than making soup and buns, but to call attention to the respective objects of their devotion. Martha is busy doing good things; Mary is attentive to Jesus and that is more important.

Rereading the anonymous fourteenth-century English spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, recently, I was led from the author's own use of the Mary/Martha story (pg. 18-22) to self-examination and reflection on our contemporary church life. Specifically, are we too busy with this world? Are we so caught up in our programs, our campaigns to end poverty, eliminate racism, cool down our warming globe, stop all war etc., that we have forgotten what is truly important? And, then, if this is indeed the case, do we not have a clear indicator why we are so anxious, why we get involved in more and more "fix-it" projects?

I am often struck by the way in which the Bible writers juxtapose their stories as a way of pulling us back from possibly mistaken applications. Is it not interesting that the story which is often used to propel us toward good works and activism for social change, namely the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is immediately followed by the Mary/Martha story and then, in the next chapter, with our Lord's teaching on prayer (Luke 11:1-13)? Note also that Jesus' teaching on prayer concludes with a reference to the one most important thing to pray for – the Holy Spirit (vs. 13).

So, are we becoming a Martha church, very busy doing all sorts of good things but losing our first love? Even worse, are we justifying all this busyness in the name of "seeking first the kingdom"? I said earlier that the Mary/Martha story brought me to self-examination. My call in this short little piece of reflection is that we all do the same.

Herman Bavinck, reflecting on the furious neo-Calvinist activism of his own day wondered about "losing ourselves in the world. Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all areas of life for Christ. But we often neglect ... [the fundamental question] ... Do we belong to Christ in life and in death. For this is indeed what life boils down to. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, even for Christian principles, if he loses his own soul." (*The Certainty of Faith* [Paideia, 1980], 94).

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ing while a fifth, Salamat Masih, remained in police custody.

Charges of "blasphemy" were brought against Salamat Masih, his son Rashid, 16, and three relatives.

Filed by a Muslim neighbor, Abdul Ghafar, the charge claims that Salamat Masih and his relative, Bao Masih, attacked Ghafar's nephew while he was on his way to join festivities for Muhammad's birthday: "They snatched a sticker from his pocket on which ... 'Muhammad Prophet of God' was printed and threw it on the ground and started beating it with their shoes."

Ghafar told police that Muslim friends had helped his nephew escape the Christian men, but that the attackers soon returned to his house with reinforcements. Armed with a pistol and wooden rods, five Christians "forcibly entered my house by breaking the door and at once started passing derogatory remarks against prophet Muhammad along with abusing my family, Faisal and me," Ghafar charged. He claimed that two members of his family were injured during the attack and received medical attention. The violence against

the Christian community began when Ghafar reported the incident to a group of Muslims holding a procession in the neighborhood to celebrate Muhammad's birthday.

Source of conflict

But local Christians told SLMP that the real source of the conflict was an argument between Salamat Masih's 11-year-old son, Daniel Masih, and his Muslim friends.

The Muslim children reportedly beat Daniel Masih when he refused to play with them on the morning of April 1, sparking a heated confrontation between Daniel's mother, Munawar Bibi Masih, and the family of one Muslim child named Sunny.

The Muslim family took offense and filed a false report with police, inciting the Muslim community to violence, Christians told the SLMP.

"It is a totally fabricated case against innocent Christians," Father Bonnie Mendes, a priest in Toba Tek Singh, told Asia News.

Anti-blasphemy laws have often been used as pretexts, escalating private quarrels into public riots against Christians.

Sabbath

Jesus: Lord of the Sabbath

Harry Mennenga

About 300 years ago, a Frenchman by the name of Francois Voltaire predicted that within a hundred years from his time Christianity would be nothing but a relic of the past. He claimed that the Christian faith would completely disappear in time to come – and he liked it that way. But he admitted that in order to get rid of Christianity the world would have to do one thing first: it would have to get rid of the Sunday. He said, “There is no hope of destroying Christianity so long as the Christian Sabbath is acknowledged and kept by people as a sacred day.”

Voltaire was wrong about Christianity disappearing from the scene, but he was right in ascribing such great importance to the Sunday for the Christian church.

The Bible also ascribes great importance to the day of rest. This special day has refreshed God’s people on their journey through the centuries. Why did God give us a Sunday? And how can we preserve this day for our children and future generations so that they, in turn, can celebrate it as a day of joy? What God’s Word says about the Lord’s Day is good news for us.

At heart it points us to three things.

Sunday points us to the past

First of all, the Sunday points us to the past, to the very beginning of human history. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” says Deuteronomy 5. And then follows the reason why: “...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and he rested on the seventh day.”

The Sunday is to remind us of what God did at the very dawn of human history. Try for a moment to visualize that day. The creation of heaven and earth is completed. And while the fresh, young world is full of bustling life – the whales frolicking in the sea, the trees blossoming and bearing fruit, the stars hurtling through space in their newly prescribed orbits, and Adam and Eve walking and working in the garden of Eden – God as it were withdraws from it all and sits back in solemn rest.

Just before the course of human history begins with all its drama and tragedy, its murders and tears and laughter, God sovereignly calls for an intermission. On that borderline between the completion of creation and the teeming tumult of

human history, there is this impressive silence and rest of God. God rested on the seventh day.

Mind you, God was not resting to recover from fatigue. God was not tired out. Rather, his rest signifies his exuberant joy and satisfaction over the work he has accomplished. God looked at the freshly created world – and saw that it was good. He rejoiced.

And now in the fourth commandment God says, “What I have done serves as a pattern for you.” Think of that: in our lives you and I must reflect the pattern of God – six days of work, one day of rest. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God...” That command accompanies the people of God on their march through the centuries.

I should point out that not all Christians think alike on this matter. Some hold that the fourth commandment is no longer binding on us New Testament believers. They consider it a temporary Jewish institution, not a creation ordinance with abiding validity. It is my conviction, however, that God is every bit concerned about our obeying this commandment today in the high tech year of 2007 as he was about people obeying it in antiquity. For his commands are not burdensome. Rather, as James chapter 2 puts it, the law is a law of liberty, of freedom.

Indeed, it is God’s will that we should have one day of rest in seven. Mind you, this rest on the Lord’s Day is not simply rest from physical and mental labor. That too, of course; we have a weekly pause in the fast and demanding tempo of our work so that we can refresh our energies for a new week of work. God never meant that his people should toil endlessly, day after day. He provides for us an oasis in our fast-paced society, so that we can be revitalized. That is God’s precious and splendid gift to us. But remembering the rest day is not a matter of taking a long nap on Sunday afternoon; it is by no means physical idleness.

Our rest is to be patterned after God’s rest; and when God rested on the seventh day after creating all things, he had great joy, he had satisfaction over the work he had accomplished. So on the Lord’s Day our thoughts go back to the great work that God has accomplished in creation; and not only in

creation, but also and especially in his Son Jesus.

Think back to that time of Deuteronomy when God’s people were first told then to remember the Sabbath Day: they had to remember not only that God rested on the seventh day, but also that they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. Keeping the Sabbath was to keep alive in their memory their rescue from slavery in Egypt.

And today we are similarly called to remember our great rescue from the slavery of sin: the good news of Good Friday and Easter that Jesus has delivered his people and set us free to serve him with joy. We celebrate God’s jubilant declaration that Jesus arose on the first day of the week. He overcame Satan and death and hell; he made a full payment for your and my sin. That’s what we remember. When you think of that, every Sunday becomes a feast day, a joyful celebration, truly a day of delight.

Sunday refers to the present

That leads us to our second consideration: the Lord’s Day refers to the present. Our Lord gives us a beautiful interpretation of the fourth commandment in the new Testament. He says, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,” that is, Jesus is the Lord and Master of our day of rest. We call Sunday the Lord’s Day, for Sunday belongs to Christ. He arose from the grave on the first day of the week. Later, after he ascended into heaven, he poured out the Holy Spirit of Pentecost on the church on that first day of the week.

The gospel of Matthew tells us that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Over against the legalism of the Pharisees, Jesus said, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” He healed the sick on that sacred day – and so Christian nurses and doctors today do their work also on Sundays – as well as firemen and policemen. There are works of necessity that are lawful activities for God’s day of rest. We are not allowed to let the sheep that falls into a pit on the rest day to drown. Animals have to be fed, cows need to be milked. Elderly people in nursing homes need to be cared for. Yes, today, too, some of us have to do some necessary work on the Lord’s Day. That’s what our Lord taught us.

To our dismay we see that in

our society today the Sunday as the Lord’s Day is on the retreat. Today in North America we are beginning to experience a collective memory loss of our Christian heritage. Rapid changes in technology call for staggered working days, and in our highly industrialized economy Christian workers face the demands for more and more shift work, and that usually leads to more and more Sunday labor.

For some 70 hours a week you and I are often subjected, at work, through the media, at school perhaps, to a constant barrage of deceptive and often profane slogans and jingles that take a toll on our value system. These things beat us down, they tend to give us fuzzy minds, and we tend to lose perspective on who God is. God says, you need to come together weekly, rhythmically, so that you will remember who I am for you. As the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, “Let us not give up meeting together.”

The Lord’s Day is a time for remembering who God is. That’s why we come together for corporate worship on Sundays: to remember God, who he is.

In church from time to time that God ambushes us. We hear the words of Isaiah 43, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” We need to hear that; we and our young people and our children need to hear that we matter to God.

In church we hear of his astounding forgiveness. You and I look over a week just passed and we see where we have failed – and to our surprise and astonishment God says, “Come to me; even though you have fallen, by my grace I can forgive you because of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. Now get up!” God as it were dusts us off and says, Come, let’s go again, together.

In church doubt leaves my mind, for I know that God is seeking me and pursuing me.

In church I look past the minister’s peculiarities to be captured and captivated by the Word that he proclaims.

In church I see that God comes to my children and sets the sign and seal of his covenant on their little foreheads.

And when in the struggles and misery of life, I lose my joy, I am invited to the table of the Lord, where I get a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath, the eternal rest

reserved for the child of God.

God knows we are prone to wander. So he says, “Close the shop. Come together for communal worship and remember what I can do for your life.” Keeping the Lord’s Day is a way for God’s people to distance themselves from a consumerist lifestyle. Keeping the Lord’s Day holy in today’s society is a counter-cultural act.

In church the Lord Jesus himself comes to draw us to himself.

Why is it, you think, that so many people today don’t keep the Lord’s day holy? One of the reasons is that they think that they must work and play just as hard as they can, and do as they please seven days a week, or else their lives will not be worthwhile. At bottom they don’t really trust God. They trust themselves, and they think to be a success and have a good life depends entirely upon their own hard work and shrewdness.

It takes trust in God to back off from your ordinary work, to back off from your play, even from your studies, when Sunday comes around, and to arrange your life so that nothing interferes with your worship of God and with your sharing the truth of God with your friends and family.

There are so many things that tempt us on Sundays these days. I think you will agree with me that we have lost something when it comes to observing the Lord’s Day and keeping it holy. Deep down we sense that somehow, something precious has been lost. Think of how it used to be before Sunday sports and Sunday shopping and Sunday labor came into the picture. Maybe you have noticed it in your own family: there is the subtle lure of attending hockey practices and games, and attending other sports and activities that can cut into the real meaning of the Lord’s Day – and sometimes as parents you fall for it and cave in, little realizing the damage being done to the Christian lifestyle you seek to foster. Don’t misunderstand me. As parents you want to show interest in your children’s sport. That’s important and wholesome. But today our Christian lifestyle is threatened.

Allow me to take you back for a moment to the summer Olympics of 1924 in Paris, France. Among the men competing in the distance races was a young man from Scot-

Continued on p. 11

Nature

Housing: for the birds



Painted birdhouses. I think they were for house wrens although they had 1-inch holes, too small for all but Liliputian wrens. Truth to tell, I think I made a couple myself, but I wasn't very good at making the gingerbread Victorian trim.

In the 1970's I remember seeing the

Calvinist Cadet Corps woodworking projects on display in the fellowship hall of the local Christian Reformed Church. Everyone was "oohing" and "aahing" about the great projects, but I got hung up on the bird houses. They were stained and varnished (or urethaned), hung diagonally, about 4" X 4", with little perches in front of the 1-inch entrance hole.

In the Lower Mainland of B.C. there are neither house wrens, nor any other birds likely to be interested (or fit) in a bird house this size, although a Bewick's wren or red-breasted nuthatch might – on occasion – take a peek.

The birds needing nesting help in the Lower Mainland are not that different from the birds needing help throughout North America: tree swallows (and violet-green swallows in the West) and the three varieties of bluebirds. These are all birds that nest on the edges of clearings in cavities of trees, barns, etc., precisely the places that humans have removed because of dangers (rotten trees and/or branches) or cleanliness (swallows in the soffits are not known for their sewage treatment plants).

Add to that the fierce competition by those invaders from Europe – house sparrows and starlings – and our native tree swallows and bluebirds are suffering in many places. The response? Build artificial nesting boxes, boxes with the needs of

birds (not noble sentiments or color schemes) in mind.

This means, for most of us, bird houses with holes large enough for bluebirds (eastern, western, and/or mountain) and the two types of swallows. It means making the holes 1 9/16 inches in diameter to keep out starlings. It means making the box deep enough: not 4"; more like 10" or 12" – the birds will fill it to the level they want it. And the paint? Natural, faded wood is the birds' first choice.

This means that many, many of the painted, varnished, urethaned, adorned, cute little boxes (let's call them yard décor boxes) are for you, not for the birds.

Art Gruenig, a member of the Rocking Mountain Naturalist Club (southeastern B.C.) started with birds, specifically western and mountain bluebirds. He had a wing-up on most of us, however: good habitat and freedom from house sparrows. Picking up on the work of Mildred White (who put up 86 boxes the first year!), Art helped establish eight bluebird "trails" in his area. As of 2005 there were 504 nesting boxes on these trails.

Records show phenomenal success, according to B.C. Naturalist magazine (Vol. 43, No. 2). Between 1990 and 2004, the club helped 20,018 bluebirds to fledgling status.

What impresses me is not only, however, only Art's (and the club's) and success. It is also how Art produces these nesting boxes.

He donates his labor to the project. He builds functional houses. He uses a standard top-opening design, but there are others (see below). Art uses 3/4-inch plywood, but the most admirable thing about Art's activities – to me, anyway – is that he builds them free for the clubs; "pays for the plywood with refund money that he gets from returning empty

bottles"; and gets donations from a condo development who donate their empty bottles.

From conception to completion, an environmentally, stewardly project.

But if I may be so bold, Art, there are two things missing. First, why buy the plywood. I ask my carpenter friend, Bill Hofsink, to put aside pieces of used 3/4-inch plywood that he would otherwise discard when he is remodeling, and scraps from new construction.

Second, it seems to me that the article about Art Gruenig doesn't mention children. What is conservation, bird-watching, bird-house construction, appreciation...what are any of these things without children?

When I taught school, I used to cut out the pieces of wood at home, even pre-drilling holes, and then bring them to school for grade 6 students to assemble. (There was quite a lot of banging and zswae-cowing from hammers and drills in that classroom.)

I always cautioned children that if they simply made house sparrow slums they would be hurting, not helping native birds. Some came back with stories like this: "Oh, we had a swallow in the house, but one of those birds you don't like is now in the house."

Kris lived right next to our school. I helped him make and erect a bird house in his backyard. He came, excited, one day

and said, "I think a black-capped chickadee is in the house." When I doubted that, he said, "But I pecked in the front (it was a front-opening box) and it was all filled with old man's beard (lichens) just like you said chickadees use." Touché. Chickadee it was.

Some students like constructing the houses, but don't want them on their town or city yard, so I erect them on road rights-of-way where students can check them out as they pass by.

When each house is finished, I hand each child a felt pen, so he or she can write name or initials on the front of the box.

In April (sometimes even March), the bluebirds return, and the swallows a little later. Then comes the feverish activity of the birds in selecting a nesting site, building a nest, incubating eggs, and feeding young. It's also a time of excitement for the makers of the nesting boxes.

It's not going to stop global warming, but making and maintaining birdhouses may be one sign that we are the inheritors of the mandate given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. It is a way of appreciating the "goodly heritage" (Ps. 16:6 RSV) that human beings get free of charge from the Sustainer of bluebirds, swallows and even pesky sparrows (Psalm 84:3).

Curt Gesch, whose pond is filling up rather nicely, thank you.

You can find lots of plans for bluebird/swallow houses, and tips on preventing predation by typing in Bluebird Houses on any search engine on your computer. Because it stresses what the birds will use rather than appealing to yard décor or your local cabinet-maker's approval, I especially like <http://www.laspilatas.com/bluebird.htm>

If you do not have or feel comfortable using a computer, your local library will be able to help you find resources without any difficulty. Or, simply ask any teen-ager to find and print some Internet sources for you.



Sabbath ... continued from p.10

land by the name of Eric Liddell. Some of us may remember the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell, a young Christian, once said, "I run because it makes me feel closer to God." He went on to become the winner of the men's 400 meter race. But his best race was always the 100 meter race.

That year the 100 meter race was scheduled to be held on a Sunday. When Eric Liddell was

told that his favorite race was to be held on a Sunday, he said he could not run in it. With thousands of spectators eager to watch him run, he refused to race on Sunday. He was forced to withdraw from the race. Keeping the Lord's Day holy meant more to him than an Olympic gold medal.

Those who really trust in God knows that their happiness is not secured by their own hard work

or play. Our happiness depends on God, and whether we walk in his ways, knowing that he takes care of us.

Sunday looks to the future

That leads us to the last consideration: the Lord's Day refers to the future. In Hebrews 4 we read, "There still remains for God's people a rest like God's resting on

See Sabbath page 13

Refugees

Refugee learning tour group visits Kakuma and Kyangwali

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

From March 11 - 24, I had the privilege of participating in the eight-member Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) Refugee Learning Tour. The tour included visits to Kakuma Refugee Camp in north western Kenya and the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda, close to the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In order to learn more about the challenges governments and humanitarian organizations face, group members met with officials from the Kenyan and Ugandan governments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Canadian High Commission in Nairobi. Wherever we went and to whomever we spoke, we met people who, with courage and dignity, faced what seemed to be insurmountable challenges.

It is impossible to capture in a few words the complexity of refugee issues that we encountered in two short weeks. Statistics reported by officials – about 72,300 refugees in Kakuma and 17,800 refugees in Kyangwali; gender and age breakdown of refugees; ethnic groups living in the camps; the number of refugees voluntarily repatriated to their countries of origin; and the number of hospitals and schools, to name a few – only sketch refugees' reality without putting flesh on it. What are refugees' lives really like?

On our visits to Kakuma and Kyangwali, I caught fleeting glimpses of what it means to be a refugee. I realize that I can't begin to fully understand what it means to be displaced, victimized, hungry, ill, longing for home, and traumatized by torture. But I can report on what I saw, and urge readers to pray that governments will embrace justice, that wars will cease, that refugees will find new homes or be able to go home, that humanitarian aid workers will receive strength, and that churches and individuals will faithfully sponsor refugees.

Courage in Kakuma

At the entrance to Kakuma Refugee Camp, a bleak, desert field of graves marked by simple crosses and piles of stones speaks volumes about the harsh plight of people who have lived and died in the camp since its establishment in 1992 with the arrival of 12,000 "Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan." As the UNHCR truck that we were traveling in passed the field and made its way into the camp, the sobering cemetery reminded me of the fragility of life in this middle-of-nowhere desert haven – Kakuma means "nowhere" in the language of the local people, the Turkana.

Our first stop was at a simple brick building with a tin roof. A young man, tidily dressed, greeted us at the entrance and welcomed us inside the simple structure where about twenty young adults sat in two rows on wooden benches by large tables. Numerous burlap sacks – printed with "Maize World Food Program/Gift of Germany/50 KG. Net/Not For Sale or Exchange" – covered

the ceiling.

The youthful teacher explained that his twenty-nine students were participants in a program that prepared students to enter Canadian universities through the World University Services of Canada (WUSC). Because of the differing levels of academic excellence in countries represented by the refugees, different nationalities were expected to achieve different minimum requirements for achieving WUSC standards. All students who met those standards would be registered in a Canadian university. Those who didn't would still be able to come to Canada through private sponsorship and upgrade their academic standards once they arrived in their new land.

The teacher asked several students to stand up and share their dreams with us. The only female student that was present that day – there are four others who weren't able to come for our visit – told us her story. She and her family had fled Somalia in 1990 when she was four years old. Speaking quietly and shyly, the Muslim woman said that, because of war, women were raped and men were killed. Her dream is to study medicine and to help others in difficult situations.

A young man also stood up to speak. A Sudanese refugee, he said he hopes to study engineering and one day return to his native land to assist in rebuilding his country's devastated infrastructure. "We feel we are not forgotten," he said, "when we see people like you cross rivers and oceans to get here."

As we drove away from the waving students, I was struck by their courage and enthusiasm. Living and studying in Kakuma is challenging because of the huge gaps these students experienced in their education due to war and trauma. And moving to Canada will be no less of a challenge as they adjust to a new culture far from home.

Bar-el-Naam Primary School was our next stop. Enthusiastic students playing in bare feet on the mud playground ran toward us, as a man with a large branch tried to herd them back toward the school.

David, our UNHCR guide, explained that the all-girls' school, with an enrollment of about one thousand students, was established about a year ago because girls feel safer coming to an exclusively female institution. Females face many threats inside the camp – child marriage, gender-based violence, and heavy work loads that make studying impossible, to name a few. An all-girls' school, sensitized to female issues, makes their success as students more likely.

The headmaster explained to us the challenges of limited resources. As an example, he pointed to the gym equipment for the entire school – one ball and five hoola-hoops. He also introduced us to the head teacher, Rachel, a twenty-year-old woman who had been in the top of her class, and therefore chosen for the demanding task of educating students in dire circumstances. On our way back to the UNHCR vehicle, I commended Rachel on her courage, taking on a daunting leadership role at such a young age. As the girls ran out of their classes to say goodbye to us, Rachel gently, but firmly, sent them back to their classrooms.

Next, we visited the hospital, a conglomeration of buildings, some made of canvas, others made of cement, and still others made of mud. Two nurses greeted us and led us to the pediatric ward. As we entered, a cleaning woman swept dead grasshoppers off the cement floor and onto the ground – the influx of grasshoppers was just beginning and would soon prove to be an irritating inconvenience for everyone. The head nurse explained that the pediatric ward had recently been moved from its original site to this more stable structure because high winds had



ripped the canvas at the previous site, and made taking care of the children impossible. Besides high winds, sometimes sand storms restrict movement of hospital staff from one building to the next.

The nurse said that usually about one hundred patients, as well as their caregivers, fill the building. Because the rainy season had not yet arrived, the number of patients was low, about twenty. The imminent spread of cholera and malaria due to the rain would cause the number of patients to burgeon.

At the urging of the head nurse, I, along with other tour participants, met with the patients. At first I felt reluctant and uncomfortable. Who was I to invade the parents' privacy? How would I feel if a stranger walked into a Canadian hospital room where I held my sick or dying child? I proceeded to visit, only because I had been urged on by the nurse. I approached each mother or father cautiously. If I saw a welcome in their eyes, I extended my hand to parent and child. If I saw no welcome, I nodded and walked past. Later, as our group walked to the vehicle, I told the head nurse that I admired her courage as she worked in very difficult circumstances.

Later that day our group experienced one of the highlights of our tour as we met with Clement and his family, whom the First Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, ON, in partnership with CRWRC, sponsored more than 18 months ago. Processing of the family's application still needs to be completed before they can come to Canada. Before the tour, Rose Dekker, refugee sponsorship coordinator for CRWRC and participant on the tour, learned that Clement and his family lived in Kakuma. Together with others, she prayed that a visit could be arranged. Clement, his extended family, and tour members met in the DRC section of the camp outside



Refugees

Clement's mud hut. After sharing a fervent prayer of thanks and a simple meal, Clement related how difficult life in the camp can be – heavy rains wash away homes, people are attacked by hostile locals who resent the refugees, and health issues are a constant concern. Later, Clement showed tour members the sturdy, cement church where he serves as pastor. Each Sunday people from various tribes and nations represented in the camp worship God there.

I witnessed courage as I met people in Kakuma – David, our UNHCR guide; the WUSC students; the girls in Bar-el-Naam Primary School; the headmaster and Rachel; the head nurse; and Clement and his family. In a harsh environment, every one of them courageously struggled and strived to cling to hope.

Kyangwali – haven marred by hostility

Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda consists of 91 square kilometers of land and is home to approximately 17,800 refugees from Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia and the DR Congo. The Ugandan government allows each family to farm a portion of land. For the first year, families receive rations of food. However, the government expects that, within a year, families will be able to sustain themselves with the produce they grow.

Ideally, refugee camps and settlements like Kyangwali are safe havens for displaced persons. However, even there danger lurks.

After an eventful day of speaking to camp officials, aid workers, teachers, and nurses, and visiting a crowded, thatch-roofed school and sparse hospital, we prepared to leave the settlement and return to Hoima along narrow, bumpy roads. As I sat by an open window in the van, a man, whom I had seen earlier in the day when we arrived, slipped two folded pieces of paper, tied together with a thin, brown thread, to me. Later, when I read the letter, which was a plea to be resettled in Canada, I was struck by the ongoing stress that refugees face even when they have supposedly found shelter. Printed below, his letter describes ongoing turmoil and risk. All identifying information has been removed and indicated by brackets. At several points, I edited the letter to make it more understandable.



Sir/ Madam:

I am a registered Sudanese refugee in Block (), Registration Card Number (). Due to insecurity which was a pressure in my country of origin, Sudan, some people put wrong allegations upon my personal life. They force use of what had happened in Sudan and they want it to exist here in Kyangwali. Find in this letter what happened.

I left Sudan in 2003 because of fear of persecution and discrimination, and worst of all, the fear of losing my life, as my father died. The worst treatment I was subjected to was by Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels. It happened that my father was a chief. He was the one who leads the community. It so happened that SPLA rebels always come and pick men from the village to join them, and those who are picked do not come back. They are killed or sent to unknown places.

In July 2003, my father, being the chief of the area, was reported to the Khartoum government that he was coordinating with the SPLA in giving them support in the form of manpower. Due to this, my father was imprisoned and brutally tortured by the Khartoum government. We had scattered as his family because we feared that the next

target would be us, his family, and, indeed, it happened to me at the time. When we heard that my father died in prison due to heavy torture, we did not see his body. They were looking for me, as the only son.

In August the same year, the SPLA attacked the sub-country. By bad luck, I was captured by the SPLA and was taken to () as a prisoner and tortured with the reason that my father reported them to the Khartoum government, that they were capturing men by force from his village to recruit as soldiers. I was detained for two months.

In October 2003, I managed to get a way of escaping at night and moved through the bushes for two weeks. I reached the border of Uganda at (). I was helped by one of the pastors who is a priest. He took me to the police. Then I was transferred to Kyangwali and registered as a refugee. But there are people in this settlement who always talk about the loss of their relatives. They say that it was my father who caused their deaths. So, I am so worried about my life if I stay in this area.

I would be grateful if my life is rescued from the death.

Yours faithfully, ()

Become informed about refugees

Becoming informed about the plight of refugees is the first step to knowledgeably and prayerfully advocating for them. The books and web sites listed below will help you get started.

Books:

The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town by Mary Pipher (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2002)

They Poured Fire On Us From the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys From Sudan by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, written with Judy A. Bernstein (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

At the Border Called Hope: Where Refugees Are Neighbors by Mary Jo Leddy (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1997).

Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid by Sarah Kenyon Lischer (London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees by Caroline Moorehead (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

What is the What? By Daniel Eggers (San Francisco: Mc Sweeney's, 2006).

Refugee Websites:

www.cic.gc.ca/english/applications/private.html www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home

www.irinnews.org/frontpage.asp?SelectTheme=Refugees-IDPs>UN opu.cz

www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/canada-europa/germany/menu-en.asp

www.crena.org/pages/justice-front.cfm/crjs-refugee-cdn.htm

www.web.net/~wren/

www.respectrefugees.org/

www.emcn.ab.ca

www.mile.ca/peeri.metropolis.net

Sabbath...continued from p. 11

the seventh day." At our death, and when Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven, he will usher his people into the eternal rest. Then the work of the Holy Spirit will be completed in us. Then all the old things will pass away and all things will become new. No sin, no tears, no more drifting off course, no compromising, no disharmony, no bickering – nothing that will mar life.

Fifty-two Sundays a year, year after year till the end of time – all these Sundays remind us that the work of mankind on earth – farming, homemaking, teaching – all of it will one day come to an end. Every Sunday reminds us that there is to be a finale to the

history of man.

Life is not an aimless existence, a mere endless succession of days, but it has a goal that lies beyond. Out on the horizon where human history will one day end beckons a rest and satisfaction that reflects the rest of God. That is what our Sundays point to: the eternal Sabbath at the end of the ages, an eternity spent in praising God, and joyfully working with him and for him on the new earth.

The question we must ask ourselves: am I assured in my heart that I am traveling toward the exciting, eternal Sabbath of rest laid away for the child of God?

In the early years of CC many of the articles in each issue were written by pastors. Gradually pastors have largely been displaced in the paper. That's good. But they shouldn't vanish completely.

I'd like to introduce a new feature in CC – a place where pastors can share the occasional sermon with us. The sermons will have to be edited somewhat to make the transition from pulpit to page, of course. But that shouldn't be too difficult.

Every Sunday, I am sure, hard-working pastors across the country produce sermons worth sharing beyond the boundaries of

their congregation. If your pastor delivers a message that you find compelling, shake his hand and whisper, "Why don't you send it to CC?"

We can't promise to publish all of them, of course, but depending on the response, we'd like to make room for one every other issue or so.

Harry Mennenga was the first to take the risk. And it is a risk, for the editor cut about 20 percent off the original. If it was weakened in the process, he takes the blame for that. If it was improved, he is far too modest to take the credit.

Medical ministry

Making a difference with MMI (Medical Ministry International)



The Indonesian team (from left to right) Maria Smedes, Tamara Hall, Nita Brunton, Allan Smedes, Dr. Andrew Seefried, Lecia Ferrell, Patricia McInerney, Michael Hubley, Kirstie Ortiz, Janny Vanderknyff, Barbara Morrison, Dr. Ken Miller, and William Hunter, Jr.

Maria Smedes

Recently a group of twelve people set out from the United States and Canada on a journey halfway across the world with the express purpose of helping the poor in the region of Jember, Indonesia, to receive eye care and cataract surgery. Each person was motivated by a strong desire to help the underprivileged of the world and a desire to reach out and serve Jesus Christ by providing spiritual and physical health care to the poor and underserved.

This group of twelve people included two Ophthalmologists Surgeons, five nurses, four general helpers, and a project director. Interestingly the three volunteers from Canada came from Grimsby and Beamsville, neighboring villages in the Niagara Peninsula, and were members of the CRC church. This was not the first time these individuals had done this type of volunteer work. As a matter of fact the greater majority of the participants had done anywhere between five to 28 projects each. This, however, was the second time a project was being held in Jember, Indonesia.

We came at the invitation of Dr. David Newton, who works for the Indonesian government teaching science courses at Jember University Medical School. His wife, a registered nurse, also teaches courses at the Nursing School. Both David and his wife come from the United States and he took his training at the same time as one of the Ophthalmologists. They and their family felt called to mission work among the people of Indonesia, and felt directed towards Jember.

Jember, is located on the island of Java, near the eastern portion of the Island, and is, in their terms, a small city of approximately one million people (three million including the outlying regions). This area is predominately Muslim, and the few evangelists that work there can truly be included under the term "persecuted church". John and his wife, trained as an agriculturalist, became a Christian when he witnessed the persecution of Christians by

his friends. His faith journey is a difficult one, and while his parents have accepted his conversion, his siblings have not and still refuse to interact with the family.

This team of 12 people worked amazingly well together. We were given the use of two air conditioned rooms (a real bonus) in the facilities of the Medical School at Jember University. All equipment and medications appropriate to the project were brought by the team members, coordinated by the project director, who was one of the surgeons. Amazingly, the classroom style rooms were quickly converted into an operation room, with pre-OR facilities, and a reception room where testing and evaluations took place.

Surgery was limited to cataracts and pterygiums (a growth on the conjunctiva). In total 332 patients were seen, 92 cataract surgeries were performed, 23 pterygiums removed, and 223 reading glasses dispensed.

Remarkable was that the cataracts encountered here were much larger than in North America. Most patients were blind and had not seen for years. One older couple came in together, both totally blind. She desperately wanted to see her grandchildren. The next morning in post-OR check-up, the lady was extremely excited when her bandage came off and discovered that she could see. He, the more stoic type, smiled.

Interestingly, as they were going out the door, the wife was already straightening out his clothing. Imagine for a moment the impact on the family – mom and dad able to go about their daily duties without help, and in turn probably capable of looking after some household duties for the extended family, e.g. babysitting while others work the fields. Then multiply that times the number of patients. The impact on that area alone is unbelievable. And to experience that metamorphosis is something difficult to put into words, but rather rewarding.



Who and what is MMI (Medical Ministry International)?

MMI is committed to meet the need for medical care among the world's poor with lasting solutions through excellence in medicine, patient care, and health education. They do this by mobilizing volunteers on short-term medical missions and establishing and equipping permanent medical centers. They work alongside national doctors and helpers from the countries they go to, joining the efforts of the local church where possible. This healing ministry strengthens village churches and enhances missions outreach in the participants' home churches. Their vision is to care annually for 100 million of the world's needy by the year 2050.

MMI is an interdenominational medical mission. Their statement of faith is the Apostle's Creed. They are a non-profit organization with international staff and offices in Texas and Ontario. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:15)

Volunteers participating on short-term medical mission trips form the foundation of the ministry. As they serve together and work hard as a team, countless lives are changed, including their own.

MMI was born in the late fifties when doctors from the USA and Canada traveled to the "field" for three-month stretches. They lent helping hands or covered for a missionary colleague who had returned to home churches to solidify their support. In the early 60s, Christian doctors in California and Texas crossed the border to Mexico, taking stethoscopes and sample medicines gathered from colleagues.

Since that time the Mission and Vision of MMI has seen great growth through support and volunteers. A record number of 1578 North American volunteers worked directly on 71 projects around the world during the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2003. Participants take one or two weeks of vacation time to go and minister to multitudes of people in developing countries.

Most projects are general medicine, surgery and dentistry. Eye projects may be surgery only or a full team of eighty including ophthalmology, optometry, opticians, nurses, techs, anesthesia, general helpers and teens. Each person pays his own way, covering flight costs and insurance, passports & visas, expenses of any inoculations or medications required for travel to the country, and a fee for lodging and meals.

Volunteer project overview

Each MMI project is certainly a unique experience when one considers the individual needs of patients, the variety of international destinations, and the dynamics of each volunteer team. Keeping in mind that flexibility is vital; here is a general overview of a typical medical mission.

The medical and project directors will assign volunteers a role, matching their skills and training with the needs of the project. Non-medical volunteers serve as General Helpers.

The people served are the least and last on the economic scale. The healthcare offered by MMI is usually all that is available to them. They minister to the patients as they treat their medical needs. The health education presentations integrate the message of the gospel.

Team members coordinate with the project's medical director before the project begins to ensure that all necessary medicine, equipment, and supplies will be available. The days are full and participants work hard as a team to see as many patients as possible during the week.

Mornings begin with a devotional after breakfast. Some teams offer optional early morning prayer times. In the evenings volunteers enjoy fellowship and relaxation with other team members. On weekends, there are often options such as the beach, sightseeing or shopping. Sunday morning worship services may be planned among the group or you may have the opportunity to visit local churches.

Lament



500 MMI centers

MMI has launched a campaign to establish 500 permanent health care facilities serving the poor around the world. Permanent centers provide an opportunity for ongoing health care to those in need as well as a consistent example of followers of Jesus Christ in a community, region, or country.

As MMI volunteers visit places on short-term trips, they build relationships with the community in hopes of having a long-term presence in their lives. With prayer and planning, these relationships can blossom into opportunities to construct a permanent center. When the building process for a new center begins, key leaders have been identified and local materials and labor are used in construction.

MMI 500 also seeks to provide advanced training for medical doctors, hospital administrators and technicians, as well as introductory training for nurses. Training national doctors and administrative staff for MMI 500 centers multiplies the reach of the medical care offered and the number of lives impacted. It is hoped that the centers will support medical and surgical care for a minimum of 500,000 patients each year.

The facilities will have state-of-the-art equipment to perform 90 per cent of surgical procedures most frequently needed by the indigent. Each center will be operated as a locally owned, not-for-profit corporation with MMI representation on each Board of Directors. Periodic visits by

MMI teams will provide ongoing encouragement and help with any surgical backlog. Local staff will provide ongoing patient care and day-to-day administration.

MMI 500 Centers now have Residency Programs to train national doctors. Along with their medical training, residents learn to walk with the Lord and develop a special place in their hearts for those in need. The teaching focuses on three components: high academic standards, an emphasis on caring for the poor, and the spiritual aspect of caring for people. Several graduates are already running MMI 500 Centers and establishing residencies of their own.

Before a new MMI 500 Center is opened, the clinic administrators are trained at the Elias Santana Center in the Dominican Republic. Administrators receive training focused on the biblical standard of servant leadership. As leaders who follow Jesus Christ, clinic staff learn that the greater their responsibility the greater their obligation to serve. Goals for the training include fostering personal relationships and teamwork and viewing people as the most valuable resource in ministry.

If you would like more information regarding MMI, you can go to the website: www.mmint.org

Medical Ministry International USA OFFICE
Mailing Address: PO Box 1339 Allen, TX 75013
Telephone: (972) 727-5864 Fax: (972) 727-7810

Email: mmitx@mmint.org

Medical Ministry Canada Inc. Mailing Address: PO Box 56086, Stoney Creek ON L8G 5C9 CANADA
Telephone: (905) 524-3544 Fax: (905) 664-8386 Email: mmican@mmint.org

If you would like to talk to a volunteer who participated in this project call either
Janny Vanderknyff
(905) 563-9315 or
Allan & Maria Smedes
(905) 309-9411

Map of Eastern Java – Jember is at the bottom right



My window seat

Mendel D. Hoekstra

Moving day

I've recently moved. I've been at my new place for about four months now and I surely miss my old place. I'm not sure where I used to live, but I know where I live now. It's a place called Cancerland. Let me tell you about it.

I didn't want to move and I also didn't see the move coming. I believe that God did, but it would have been helpful if he would have given me a hint. It was on a day after my wife Marisa and I were planning on trying to have another child. Then the doctor told us that my dear Marisa has cancer.

Welcome to Cancerland. Hold on. Buckle up. It is quite a ride.

We are not planning any more children because I've come to recognize that Cancerland is not a good place for kids. My nearly 5-year-old son asked me last week when cancer was finished. It's apparent that he is also not a fan of Cancerland.

Cancerland is a place where it seems people don't really know what to say. Sometimes people say things like: "God won't give more than you can handle"; or "Keep your chin up." I wonder if those people say those things to try and cure themselves from being uncomfortable. I am uncomfortable a lot since I've moved to Cancerland. So are most people. A lot of people speak scripturally, sometimes too much for the situation. Sometimes a groan is all I need to hear.

Cancerland has shown me that the often said "How are you?" is used more as a greeting than a question.

Cancerland isn't a place for theologians. It isn't a place for those who try and take something so non-academic (Jesus and his grace) and place him into an academic, understandable box. I've read a lot of theologians over the past four months. Many of them have their PhD's or doctorate in theology. Many of them try and decipher why bad things happen or what the will of God is during suffering. I would appreciate those articles if at the end of them, the writers would say, "But after all what I just said, I still don't understand life, suffering and the role of God...but I'm still going to believe."

That kind of thinking is real to me.

Whether God allowed my move to Cancerland or willed it or let it happen, it doesn't matter or help. I still believe that he is in charge.

I've come to realize that I am the only person in the Cancerland that I live in and that Marisa is the only person in the Cancerland where she lives. Although we are holding each other throughout the ride, I cannot drink her cup. As much as I want to take sips, swigs and gulps from her cup, and as much support as we have, Marisa still needs to drink that cup herself. I cannot totally understand what she is going through and she also cannot totally understand what I am going through.

I had no idea how costly Cancerland is. Things are expensive here, especially thoughts. Nights in Cancerland are not fun. Nights in Cancerland are not for friends of the devil. The devil likes nights in Cancerland. He tries to creep into night thoughts. Night thoughts are the scariest and most costly thing in all of Cancerland.

There aren't many nice things in Cancerland – except that Jesus is everywhere. He is everywhere I look. He is in our daily mail as well as in daily conversations with people who love us. He is easily seen in science and medicine. I can taste him in the meals that we get from friends. I can hear him in our Sunday sermons and the music that I listen to. I can smell him in the spring air. I can read him in some of the e-mails that I get from strangers. I can feel him and his Spirit when I hold Marisa. I can feel him when I stand next to my pastor and instead of quoting scripture he just groans.

At times I wish that I would hear him speak more loudly but then when I try and listen better his voice gets clearer.

Welcome to Cancerland. I don't understand why or how I got here but I'm here now and that is all that matters. And even though there is no one to blame and no one to finger...I'm still going to believe.

Mendel D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Menomonee Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with Marisa and their three children.

Ecclesiastes

The moral act in an absurd world

*Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.*

Ecclesiastes 11:1

A. A. van Ruler

The Preacher is approaching the end of his reflections, and he feels that it is time to sum things up and come to a conclusion. He has been reflecting on the question why human beings lead such busy lives filled with toil. Is there meaning in it? Does it yield anything? Does all that activity and so human life have any real content and a real outcome?

He posed this question in a variety of ways. He has, we might say, pursued every possibility one can think of. One person may find the meaning and purpose of life in one thing and someone else in another. But in every instance the Preacher remains critical, thinking it through to the end. He has unmasked as error or illusion every notion we employ to console ourselves, whether theoretically or practically.

His conclusion is that life is meaningless. It is empty. It seems to be something, but it is nothing. Like a beechnut, it may be well-shaped, glossy and colorful on the outside, but it is deficient on the inside. There is no fruit in it. The same is true of human life. If you examine it closely, you discover that it contains nothing of lasting value. So it produces nothing.

In this respect, the book of Ecclesiastes has much in common with contemporary sensibilities about human life. Nowadays, people no longer say that everything is meaningless; instead they speak of human failings.

By this they do not mean that humans are always falling short, that they fail to do what they should and that they are therefore guilty. Nor do they mean that human beings are sinful and therefore by nature incapable of any good. People have by and large abandoned the Christian teaching of the Fall and original sin.

Many of our novelists and poets are far more somber than the most severe preacher. The cultural elites tend to enjoy themselves in the same way as Puritans used to enjoy fire-and-brimstone sermons. They often allude darkly to the guilt of human existence. Human existence as such seems to display a certain lack – in every dimension of life. Humanity appears to be a misbegotten joke.

That there is an affinity between the reflections of the Preacher and this modern sensibility is undeniable. But the book of Ecclesiastes isn't the only book in the Bible. As a whole the Bible gives us a much sunnier outlook on mankind and human life. I point this out, however, not to deny the truth of what the Preacher has said, but because it testifies that there is deliverance for us from the ruin in which we find ourselves. That is the central theme of the Bible, one that is often overlooked nowadays.

Meanwhile, it is intriguing to see the conclusions the Preacher comes to on the basis of his preceding reflections. This text gives us one of these conclusions. He says, Cast your bread on the waters, for after many days you will find it again. No matter how we interpret these words, they contain a prompting to act. We are called on to do something. We must throw out – the word actually means "send out" – our bread on the water.

That is rather strange, isn't it? The Preacher refuses to keep bewailing the absurdity of human existence. Nor does he end up raging at everything or trying to smash it to bits.



Melancholia by Albrecht Durer

What will our current mood of despair lead to? Some seem to have no other solution than to huddle together against the darkness of the night and speak words of nonsense to one another just to be saying something.

For some, despair has become so deep that even words offer no hope: there is nothing left to say that offers anything in the way of reason. All that is left is nonsense. This seems to be the unavoidable conclusion to the insight that human existence is absurd since it falls short in every way and makes us guilty. Suppose, however, that our heads of state huddled together in this way and deliberately began speaking nonsense just to hear themselves talk.

The Preacher asks, Are we here to talk and to think? Does it all depend upon our knowing and seeing the purpose, content and outcome of existence? Or are we here first of all to act – and, more specifically, to act in the sense of doing good?

There's more to it than this, to be sure. In essence we aren't here to do good but to enjoy the good, also the goods of this earth, and in our joy to praise our Creator. Praise and thanksgiving are the ultimate end of existence. This is the liturgical situation of mankind. The liturgical is far higher than the ethical, just as the ethical is far higher than the theoretical. To enjoy the good is more than doing good, just as doing good is more than knowing good.

Nevertheless, our text still leaves us in the middle of the ethical sphere, that is, the sphere of doing good, the sphere of action. Human beings must act. We must not trap ourselves in thought. That would lead to brooding, and brooding leads to madness. For we can't make heads or tails of reality. We must never presume to capture the whole truth in words. And we must not hang our soul or salvation on it. We will never discover the true meaning of existence and of everything that is and that happens in pure theory. Perhaps we'll have to wait till we're in eternity, when the last judgment is spoken.

Until then, we'll have to act; we'll have to cast our bread, our provisions, all that we possess on the waters. We'll have to risk them. We may not anxiously hang on to them because we are afraid of losing them. We must dare to let go, to send them out, for they must be put to work in the world.

Yes, we must dare to cast our bread upon the waters, where it gets completely dissolved. Nothing will be left of it. There is something destructive about water and its bottomless depths. There is something chaotic about water and the sea. We must entrust our bread even to the epitome of absurdity.

We must be so active in the middle of all the absurdity as to make a frontal attack on absurdity.

Some have taken the text to say invest all your capital in shipping – in overseas trade. That's not a bad image. It also captures the idea that we must enter into the chaos of existence and expose ourselves to it.

Only in this way will the bread that we have cast out return to us. After many days. So it may take a long time. It may even look as if it was lost. We take tremendous risks. Everything is at stake. But at last it comes back. It yields something – or at least, it may. Not always, mind you. The bread may also perish in the water, just as a human being may perish. But it can also make it – but only after many days, after passing through chaos.

What the writers of despair say is, therefore, not the same thing as what the Preacher is saying here. His words carry a note of activism. But above all they carry a note of expectation. The Preacher has hope. Although he says that he cannot find any meaning in existence, he does not inflate this into the glib conclusion that therefore there is no meaning in human existence. He is more modest. He says: God is the one who does it all, and what he does he must do with wisdom; however, I cannot fathom this wisdom.

This is the question posed to us: will we be modest, simple, humble – will we respect God? Or will we be glib, inflated? And will we assume that what we cannot see is not there – namely, the meaning of existence?

Coping/Synod

Draw on your strengths to cope with chronic illness

Lisa M. Petsche

One in three Canadians has a chronic illness, defined as a permanently altered state of health that significantly affects daily living. Examples include arthritis, osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease and neurological diseases such as Parkinson's disease.

Upon diagnosis of a major medical condition, most people initially go into a state of shock or disbelief. Subsequent emotions usually include anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness and loneliness.

With progressive diseases, losses can be many, including strength, coordination, energy, communication, bodily functions, roles and responsibilities, previously enjoyed pastimes and plans for the future. Resulting dependence on others can strain relationships and negatively affect self-esteem.

Time frames vary for individuals, but eventually most people come to accept the reality of their situation. At that point they're ready to plan for their future and take control of it as much as possible.

Coping tips

If you or a loved one have been diagnosed with a chronic illness, following are ways to empower yourself mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

- Learn as much as possible about the illness and its management, and educate family and friends to help them understand.
- Be receptive to learning new ways of doing things and trying new activities. Concentrate on what you can rather than can't do.
- Cultivate an attitude of gratitude, consciously focusing on the good things in your life, such as supportive relationships and your religious faith, and seeking beauty and tranquility – for example, through appreciation of art or nature. Learn to live in the moment and enjoy life's simpler pleasures.
- Redefine what quality of life means to you, recognizing that there are many ways to lead a meaningful life. Remind yourself that your identity goes much deeper than your appearance and physical abilities.
- Find an outlet for expressing your thoughts and feelings – perhaps talking with a friend, keeping a journal or participating in a support group.
- Accept that how you feel and what you can do may vary from day to day, and be flexible about plans and expectations. Take things one day at a time.
- Recall past life challenges and how you overcame them, to remind yourself of your resilience and generate hope.
- Stay connected to people who care. If your social network is limited, develop new connections through volunteering, taking an adult education course or joining a club or group.
- Allow yourself plenty of time to adjust to your illness and the lifestyle changes it necessitates. Recognize that your family and friends will also need time to adjust, and may not know what to say or do. Let them know how you wish to be treated, and keep the lines of communication open.
- Do something nice for someone. It will take your mind off your own situation and boost your self-esteem.
- Set aside quiet time each day, to nurture your spirituality and help keep you grounded.
- Turn to your faith for comfort. Ask God to give you the strength to face challenges with courage and grace, and place your trust in him.
- Seek counseling if you get stuck in one of the phases of grieving, such as anger or depression, or find yourself making unhealthy lifestyle choices.
- Recognize that no matter what happens, you always have a choice about how to respond. Tap into your mental power.

Final thoughts

However unwelcome it may be, illness – like other life crises – presents opportunities for growth. Many people gain a richer perspective on life, discover inner resources they didn't

See **Coping** on page 19

A Cloud of Witnesses to surround Synod 2007

...Surrounded by a cloud of witnesses... Hebrews 12:1

The annual synodical meeting of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) is scheduled to take place during the week of June 10. The *Agenda for Synod 2007* is published and available in all CRC churches. It can be also found on the CRC website at www.crcna.org.

I am especially interested in this synod's discussion on the role of women in the church. The agenda shows that twelve classes and one congregation have submitted overtures to synod regarding this subject. Eleven classes sent 13 overtures requesting synod to adopt a change to the Church Order by deleting the word male in Article 3a, which describes the eligibility criteria for ordained office. At the same time they request that no restrictions be placed on this change. The restrictions referred to were recommended by Synod 2006. They state that women are not to serve as synodical delegates or synodical deputies, and that the assemblies of our denomination not discuss the use of women's gifts for the next seven years. Two more overtures prefer no changes to the Church Order.

It is exciting to see so many people respond in favor of full inclusion of women. Having followed the discussion on women in office for decades, and having experienced many ups and downs in the process, I have renewed hope for the future of the CRC. It appears more people are gaining a better understanding of the complexities of restricting women's full participation in the church.

Overview of the overtures

It is interesting to read the arguments presented in the overtures. The following statements represent an overview of the reasons the various classes present for opening all ordained offices to women with no restrictions:

- The decision of Synod 2006 officially creates two levels of ecclesiastical office in the Church Order. This is inconsistent with our understanding of ordained offices.
 - The proposed moratorium to take a sabbath rest from the discussion stifles the discussion, and dishonors women currently serving, and seeking to serve, in ordained offices.
 - The word sabbath-rest misuses the biblical concept of Sabbath.
 - The decision does not respect the official pronouncement of Synod 1995 that there are two perspectives on the role of women in the church, both honoring the Scriptures.
 - Synod 2005 decided that women could serve as synodical deputies as long as a male minister was the alternate, thus honoring both perspectives. Synod 2006 reversed this decision, taking a role away from women.
 - Synod 2005 stated that as soon as the majority of classes supported the ordination of women the discussion would be re-opened. Instead Synod 2006 closed it down.
 - The decision breaks with the long tradition of moving forward in acknowledging gender equality – women gaining a vote in 1957, serving as deacons in 1984, as elders and ministers in their local churches in 1995, and as synodical deputies in 2005.
 - To state that having female synodical delegates violates the conscience of some male delegates is not valid. Male delegates have a choice not to attend synod. As well, women already participate in synodical committees and provide leadership to the denomination in many ways.
 - The two overtures not in favor of including women suggest there are no new grounds for changing the Church Order, the Bible speaks clearly on the role of women, and change threatens the unity of the church.
- Classis Lake Erie in overture 21 offers an interesting

BuildingTrust

Vicky Van Andel Ed.



analysis on the violation of conscience argument. It states: "Conscience cannot be a matter of one's feelings and thoughts about something. Conscience must and can be instructed. Consciences of both individuals and groups can be wrong and insensitive. One's conscience may lack sensitivity to what one ought to be sensitive to, as in the case of someone who is born into a racist society and never thinks further of it. Contrarily, one's conscience may be sensitive to what one ought not to be sensitive to, as in the case of Peter's refusal to eat what he regarded as unclean food. Claiming conscience all by itself is not an argument for or against a certain policy. An argument must show why the issue in question deserves to be a matter of conscience."

For your interest and information, the classes that sent overtures in favor of full inclusion of women are: Lake Erie, Huron (Canada), Chicago South (two separate overtures), Grand Rapids East, Muskegon, BC South East (Canada) (two separate overtures), Kalamazoo, Alberta North (Canada), Northern Illinois, Greater Los Angeles, BC North West (Canada). Classis Chatham (Canada) also approved an overture. It is not printed in the *Agenda* but has been sent to synod. The overtures from Classis Illiana and Trinity CRC, Sparta, Michigan oppose a change to the Church Order.

Hearts Aflame and Cloud of Witnesses

A number of women in Grand Rapids have organized two working groups to highlight the many ways the gifts of women enrich the church. Both groups are raising awareness of the discussions at synod. One group, *Hearts Aflame* (Luke 24:32), is organized by five female pastors. It has planned four prayer vigils to be held prior to Synod 2007. It also offers a complete liturgy on www.heartsaflame.com for people interested in organizing a prayer vigil in their own church community. The goal of *Hearts Aflame* is to support the growing number of female office bearers in the CRC. It plans to continue its ministry in the future.

The second group has named itself *Cloud of Witnesses* (Hebrews 12:1). Its goal is to surround the synodical delegates as a cloud of witnesses testifying of God's faithfulness and bearing testimony to the wonderful ways our denomination is blessed by the service of its women members. This group plans to dissolve after Synod 2007. Both groups are working together at this time.

People interested in learning more about these two groups, or who would like to create a group in their own church community, can find information on www.cloudofwitnesses.org. The site also has a link to *Hearts Aflame*. Tax deductible contributions to support these efforts may be sent to:

(Canada) Jubilee Fellowship CRC
13 Wilholme Drive RR3, St Catharines ON L2R 6P9
(US) Classis Grand Rapids East
1239 Fuller SE, Grand Rapids MI 49506

Let's pray for a wise decision by the synodical delegates. I quote Classis Lake Erie once more: "Delay is not always healing; sometimes what is required is decisive action. To paraphrase the ancient preacher, there is a time to wait and a time to act. There comes a time when it is necessary to do something and move on." Shirley Roels from Grand Rapids states this: "To meet the needs of our world, the Christian Reformed Church needs every member, whether male or female, engaged in ministry. We must use all our resources to reclaim this world for Christ and allow each person to respond to the Spirit's claim on her or his calling."

The CRC also celebrates its 150th anniversary this year. What a wonderful opportunity for the church to move forward with women and men joyfully serving God in full and equal partnership!

Missions

A special church and a special pastor

*I know your afflictions and your poverty
yet you are rich. Revelations 2:9a*

Adrian and Wendy Helleman

Immanuel Baptist Church, located in the heart of a Muslim community not far from the University of Jos, holds a story which needs to be told. It is a story of grace amidst struggle and opposition. We have known its pastor, Sunday Gwamna, since we first came to Nigeria. He had invited us to worship with them on numerous occasions, but somehow we were never able to honor this request. We had visited the church often enough, but never on a Sunday. However, in mid-February Pastor Sunday invited Adrian to preach, and this time there were no conflicting plans.

The first service started at 8:30 and was in English. Adrian preached from Luke 14:15-24 on "The Great Banquet." In this message he urged the members to help their pastor in reaching out to the mostly Muslim community of their neighborhood, supporting the programs of evangelism and concrete aid already sponsored by the church. Later that morning he preached a similar message for the Hausa-language service. At this service Pastor Sunday translated for him. Although both services were well attended, it was readily apparent that most of the people of the congregation preferred Hausa. If students and educated people use English, the rest of the people of this area of Jos are more comfortable using Hausa which is the lingua franca of northern Nigeria as well as other sub-Saharan countries.

An "emir," or traditional ruler, was present at the first service. Although emirs are generally Muslim, this man is a Christian. His presence at the service is an indication of the enormous changes occurring throughout Northern Nigeria. While the general image of the North is still one of a predominantly Muslim society, there are many Christians now living throughout this part of Nigeria. In fact, the Hausa Muslims are slowly losing the political control which they long considered their birthright. Such changes also constitute the hidden factors which have led to the ongoing strife between Christians and Muslims over the implementation of sharia or Islamic law in many northern states.

But the area of Jos where the church is located is still predominantly Muslim, as we recognized in trying to locate the building that Sunday. It had been some time since our last visit, and most of the lanes look alike, nor were there any street signs to help us. So we asked people, all appearing to be Muslim, if they could give us some direction. No one seemed to know. Finally Adrian did recognize one of the side streets taking us right to the church. It was not far from a main road, but in that rough terrain we could have wished for a vehicle built higher off the road, or even one with four-wheel drive. Certainly the church is not visible from the main roads and the farther one is from main roads, the less these streets receive any attention or upkeep.

Our first visit to this church had been made shortly after our arrival in Nigeria (April 2002). At the time American friends and colleagues had asked us to accompany them to what was left standing of the church building, for it had been burned down in the Jos crisis of September 2001, only a few short months before we came. This was the crisis which devastated Jos, starting barely four days before 9/11. But it was largely ignored by the international media, for events in the United States captured the center of attention; it also received little attention because this crisis took place in the rather 'out-of-the-way' country of Nigeria. So we will tell you only one of many stories that still need to be told about



New church under construction



Immanuel Baptist Church, burned (2002)

this crisis and its aftermath.

The members of Immanuel Baptist Church did not take long to rebuild after that September crisis. The church building soon rose, phoenix-like, out of the ashes. Attempts were made to build a wall around the property, to give it some protection from hostile forces in the neighborhood. But in May of 2002, before the wall was finished, another crisis erupted, this time over registration of voters in the northern district of Jos. Although the crisis did not escalate to the proportion of the previous September, the church did become a target, and was burned once more.

The photos of the destruction and burning of the church were taken immediately after this second incident. But there is an amazing testimony of God's grace here, for on the front wall of the battered building, if one looks closely, one can make out what remains of the words painted there after the first burning: "Father forgive them." This is the testimony of the members, many of whom lost everything they owned the previous September because they were associated with this church, as Christians. The pastor too lost his home and all his belongings.

It is a remarkable illustration of the faith that sustains them, and their attitude to the neighbors who had destroyed their building and all it contained. Little did they realize at the time that Muslims would destroy their church again within a very short time.

Immanuel Baptist Church has been through a lot, but there is more to tell. The story of this church in the last few years is largely the story of its pastor, Sunday Gwamna, whom we knew only a little at first, since he was then pursuing studies for a Bachelor of Divinity degree at the Baptist Seminary in Ogbomoso (as well as serving as the pastor of the congregation). During the past months we have gotten to know him better, for he has enrolled in the Master's program in Biblical Studies at Unijos, and at present is a member of Wendy's class in the Greek New Testament.

Pastor Sunday is a born evangelist. He is one of the most gifted evangelists we have met in this country. When we were teaching a course in Ogbomoso a few years ago and met Sunday there, we discovered that the seminary had awarded him the prize for starting more churches than any other student. Even while studying he had planted churches among Hausa-speakers who were living in Ogbomoso. He has also planted numerous churches in Jos and the surrounding area. He will go out during the week and trek for hours into the bush to find

people who have not yet heard the gospel. (Indeed, there are still many villages in this area where people have never heard the good news about Jesus Christ.)

Not only is Sunday a gifted evangelist, he is a man of exceptional wisdom. After the second incident, he could have complained, as did many other pastors, about the behavior of Muslims who burned churches. He did something different and unexpected. The governor of Plateau State had invited him and some of his Muslim neighbors to a meeting in order to investigate these church burnings. Rather than blaming the Muslims, he spoke glowingly about those neighbors who did not assist in the burnings and offered help to Christians instead. The Muslims at the meeting were so surprised that they later told Sunday that his church would never again be attacked; they would personally guarantee that. And it has been spared, even though the area has experience a series of minor crises since the major ones in 2001 and 2002.

The church has served this Muslim-dominated area for about 15 years now. During the second service that Sunday, the elderly pastor who had started Immanuel Church many years ago was present and led the dedications of several children of the congregation. It was his vision that is now being implemented by Pastor Sunday, for aside from vigorous programs of evangelism and neighborhood aid, the

Pastor Sunday and his family



Reflections



Welcome to
my perch
Bert Witvoet

South Africa's attempt at improving life for the blacks

As I write this column for *Christian Courier*, I find myself sitting in a simple cottage overlooking a man-made lake in the Northern Province of South Africa, the Limpopo province, formerly known as Transvaal. I am here with my wife, Alice, and six other Canadian Christian school educators and administrative people. We came to lead a conference for 94 teachers representing Ten Christian Schools in the Venda area, and to work beside them in their classrooms after the conference. While here, we are learning a few things about the political and social climate in South Africa.

In South Africa, the land settlement issue is a touchy subject, as it is in Canada. The only reason Canada is not moving fast on this issue is that its Aboriginal population is a tiny minority. In South Africa, the whites are a minority, though a more powerful minority compared with Canada's native peoples.

A special church *continued*



Housing beside church

congregation has also undertaken a substantial building program. The church is constructing a newer and much larger building beside their present one. The skeleton of the much larger sanctuary can be seen behind the present structure. The church also hopes to be able to open a school for area children. Needless to say, we thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of worshiping with this vibrant church that is pastored by one of our own students. The feeling was mutual, it seems. The church leaders asked us to come back and preach again soon — "every month," one suggested!

It will take many more years before Immanuel Baptist will be able to complete the new church building, since they are by no means rich in the material sense. Yet they are rich spiritually. Their pastor is clearly enthusiastic about doing evangelism, and we pray that his work of reaching out in the area where the church is located, as well as in other parts of the city, may bear much fruit. With its new building on top of a hill, this church has a very strategic location. May it continue to be a beacon of hope to its community and to the whole city of Jos.

Coping *continued from page 17*

know they possessed, develop new interests, acquire new skills and form new relationships or experience deepening of existing ones.

If you are living with a chronic illness, rise to the challenges it presents, perceiving yourself as a survivor rather than a victim. Attitude really does make a big difference.

Lisa M. Petsche is a clinical social worker who assists chronically ill adults and their caregivers. She is also a freelance writer specializing in health, spirituality and family life.

From Mr. Thenga, a black Reformed Christian who works for the government in Johannesburg and deals with land settlement issues, we learned about South Africa's attempt to have more blacks become landowners and business owners. As for land and farms, when these have been in white hands since before 1913 (when records were beginning to be kept), no claim by South African blacks can successfully be made against them. But when it concerns white ownership after 1913, blacks can make a claim if they can prove that they or their ancestors were forcefully removed from the land under consideration. If they succeed in convincing a government land settlement committee that they used to live on the land and were forcefully removed, the white farmer or owner will be advised that he will cease to be the owner of all unmovable goods, such as land and buildings. The ultimate ownership will go to the government but the successful claimant or claimants will be the defacto owners. The original owner will be compensated if he wishes to leave the land altogether, or he can negotiate a way of staying on the farm as manager for 15 years and of getting a certain percentage of the profit for that length of time, up to 51 percent. The government prefers that the original owner stays on and continues to invest his capital and knowledge. After 15 years, he can either renegotiate a contract or take compensation and leave. Businesses in South Africa, too, have to accept black partners and must meet a certain quota when it comes to employing workers.

Although the prospect of losing ownership of a farm that may have been in the family for, let's say, 80 or 90 years is not attractive to the white farmer, some of them make it work, as they hope South Africa will prosper under the new regime. It must be said that the South African attempt to restore to black Africans ancestral lands that were taken by white settlers is much to be preferred to the way its northern neighbour Zimbabwe and its leader President Mugabe have chased white farmers off their farms and have in the process ruined the agricultural sector and the country's economy. Zimbabwe used to be the breadbasket of Southern Africa. At this time it has become an impoverished and desperate nation. It is estimated that more than 49,000 Zimbabweans are illegally crossing South Africa's northern border each month (the April 1 issue of the *Sunday Times*). Zimbabwe has an estimated unemployment rate of 89 percent. South Africa has about 50 percent unemployment, so its situation is also precarious.

Some of the teachers at our conference and who teach at participating school are from Zimbabwe. Apparently the Venda people here are originally also from Zimbabwe and speak a similar language.

For Joao Albasini V, the white owner of a large tract of land that includes the lakeside fishing camp we are staying at ("Hengel Parady"), the situation is quite different. His property has been in his family since 1832, and he can prove it. His ancestor Joao I, was a Portuguese man who became paramount chief of the Shangaans nation (the only white man ever to lead an African tribe) and who married an Afrikaner woman. The Shangaans held sway over a vast area of the Easter coast that included Mozambique. Under the leadership of Joao Albasini I, the Shangaans came to the Transvaal (now Limpopo province) where they fought and conquered most of the Vendas. Joao I himself settled in the Soutpan Mountains region, where Joao V still has a farm and fishing camp.

Joao V can prove all this, yet he regularly has to defend his claim against frivolous claims by blacks (one of them grew up on his farm as a baby). Although Joao is not afraid of losing title to his land, each time someone challenges him, it costs a hundred thousand Rands. Joao feels much

less secure about the future of his family in South Africa than Mr. Thenga, the land settlement official, led us to believe he would feel. In fact, although he favours an orderly transfer of landownership to blacks who know how to take care of farms and businesses, he is afraid that if the current government does not smarten up, South Africa will end up in five years where Zimbabwe is now. He is still hopeful that the tide will turn. President Mbeki is considered a more moderate person than Mugabe and the legacy of Nelson Mandela still hangs over the land as a healing influence.

There is another reason for Joao's pessimism. Joao used to employ 120 black workers on his farms, but ever since the minimum wage of R5 an hour has been introduced by the government, he had to reduce that number to eight workers, as he had to sell off some land as well. This left 112 workers without gainful employment. Some of these laid-off workers have come back to the farm begging for work at the previous wage. But Joao can't afford to hire these workers, nor would he be allowed to let them work for that lower wage. Now they have nothing.

I'm not criticizing the South African government for introducing a minimum wage or for their land settlement policy. The inequalities between blacks and whites were simply unacceptable. But the transition is very painful and risky. A constant reminder to us not to be judgmental is the realization that we in Canada are in a much better position to help restore pride and hope among our Aboriginal peoples, but we have failed miserably because the political will is not there, and because we are hampered by those forces that seek first political correctness and political expediency, and are not willing to face up to the unpopular measures required to bring real improvement to the lives of our First Nation peoples.

No one but God knows what the future for South Africa holds. The cities are breeding grounds for crime. In central Johannesburg five-star hotels have been boarded up and the white population and businesses have fled to the suburbs. Here in Venda, a more rural area, the crime rate is considered low. What we as Christian educators are trying to do is bring some of our insights and expertise to the black Christian school in the Venda area. There is hope for South Africa, as there is for all of Africa. With God's help, the Christian community here can raise up leaders who will be salt and light in this environment. The black Reformed churches are growing, we were told, even more so than the Pentecostal churches with their emphasis on a prosperity gospel. People are beginning to see that the Reformed emphasis on God's sovereignty and a more creation-oriented form of redemption is more believable.

You should have seen the eagerness with which the teachers at the conference received our lectures and workshops. And their ability to burst out into song and dance as an expression of their joy and thankfulness was more reward than we could have expected.

Let me end with some lines of the beautiful South African national anthem:

"Nkosi sikeleli Africa Morena boloka sechaba se heso, o felise dintwa le matswenyeo," which means: "God bless Africa God bless our nation and put an end to the fight and the struggles."



Bert Witvoet is the former editor of *CC*, now retired, who stays active by editing the *Christian Educators Journal* and preaching the occasional sermon. He tries to stay informed by hearing and reading the daily news and Reformed by looking for writers and speakers who can tell the forest from the trees.

Classifieds

Birthday	Anniversaries	Classifieds
 <p>With great thankfulness to God, we celebrate the 90th Birthday of our father</p> <p>Jake (Jaap) Hoogerbrugge</p> <p>on May 8th, 2007.</p> <p>Congratulations Dad. We pray for God's continued blessing on your life</p> <p>With love and best wishes from your children: Henny Hoogerbrugge Arie & Gerty Hoogerbrugge John & Dawn Hoogerbrugge and 7 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren</p> <p>Address: Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Avenue Grimsby ON L3M 4N5</p>	<p>Happy 40th Anniversary!</p> <p>TONY AND STEFFIE BODINI (nee Zantingh)</p> <p>April 28, 2007</p> <p><i>Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6</i></p> <p>God is good! He has blessed our parents with 40 years of marriage. Mom and Dad, thank you for showing us the love and faithfulness of God in your marriage. May he continue to watch over you for many more years!</p> <p>Congratulations and love from your family: Richard & Cindy Bodini - Philip, JoyAnna, Michael, Evan Connie & Tom Hammers</p> <p>Home address: 148 Park Avenue W, Chatham ON N7M 1W1</p> <p>Happy 50th Anniversary!</p> <p><i>Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16</i></p> <p>With joy and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, we hope to celebrate the 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents</p> <p>ALBERT AND ELISABETH DE ROO (nee Veenstra)</p> <p>on May 24th, 2007</p> <p>We pray that the Lord may continue to guide and bless them.</p> <p>With love from all of us: Petra Talsma, Markham, ON Sarah Pauline & Wally Bishop, Richmond Hill, ON Brooke, Erik, Robyn, Kyle Paul & Judy DeRoo, Courtice, ON Cheryl, Jesse James, Andrew, Jennifer, Lindsay, Chantelle, Rebecca, Dawn Marianne Pappas, Aurora, ON Michelle, Tyler Janet & Peter Kingma, Byron Center, MI USA Stephanie, Alex, Chantelle, Mitchell, Joshua Richard & Michelle De Roo, Ajax, ON Marissa</p> <p>Correspondence: Albert & Elisabeth De Roo 55 Nottingham Drive, Richmond Hill ON L4S 1Z8</p> <p>DERK AND RIE NANNINGA</p> <p>May 7, 1947-2007</p> <p>Thanks for your love and care and for your faithful commitment to the Lord. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!</p> <p>Love from: Gerda & Dave Repol, Whitby, ON Sandy & Bill (Theo) Trees & Harley (Arjen & Iris) Andrew & Jennifer John & Karen Nanninga, Unionville, ON Nathaniel Natalie Rick & Elizabeth Nanninga, Brighton, ON Jennifer & Joel Lisa & Kevin Michael Sarah</p> <p>Correspondence address: Mr. and Mrs. D. Nanninga 200 Glen Hill Drive Unit 701, Whitby ON L1N 9W2</p>	<p>DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION <i>Christian Courier</i> is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.</p> <p>RATE: (GST added to rates listed) All personal and family announcements: \$6.00 per square inch. rose@christiancourier.ca Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$8.00 per square inch. email: ads@christiancourier.ca</p> <p>PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.</p> <p>PERSONAL ADS: CC would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.</p> <p>NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS: We offer a \$25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in CC and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.</p> <p>SUBMITTING YOUR AD Mail: <i>Christian Courier</i> 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7 fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above</p> <p>OTHER INFORMATION: <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.</p>
<p>Personal</p> <p>Active, fit widower, 65, likes reading, good conversation, gardening, woodworking, day-tripping, seeks female companion with similar interests. Reply to: File 2759 c/o Christian Courier 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p> 		
In Memoriam	Obituaries	
<p>Remembering on Mother's Day, our dear mom, grandma and oma.</p> <p>GERRIE GRIFFIOEN (nee Stammers)</p> <p>Born in the Netherlands July 8, 1931 entered into the presence of her Saviour, after a brief illness, on Thursday, January 18, 2007 at the Extendicare Nursing Home in Lindsay.</p> <p>Her children, Cora & Richard Wilms, Henry & Lois Griffioen, Annette Griffioen, and Geraldine & John McFall saw her peacefully and quietly, amid songs and prayers, pass from this life. Our comfort is that she is now rejoicing with a whole mind and clear vision in Heaven along with her predeceased husband, Bill, her daughter, Anita, and her son, Richard.</p> <p>She is also survived by her grandchildren, Amanda & Michael Kleinhuis, Sarah & Ron Tremblay, Jared Wilms & his fiancée Michelle Westra, Reuben Wilms; Marcia, Cynthia, Corina, Kurtis & Janna Griffioen; Ezra, Joseph and Adam Griffioen; Adrian DeVisser and Jordan McFall. Three great-grandchildren, who called her 'Oma', are Samuel & Jonas Kleinhuis and Victoria Tremblay.</p> <p>She was the dear sister of Nel VanAbbema, Martin Stammers, Sr. and John Stammers.</p> <p>A service celebrating her life was held at the Christian Reformed Church in Lindsay, Ontario on Tuesday, January 23, 2007.</p> <p>Correspondence: Cora Wilms 364 Angeline St N, Lindsay ON K9V 4R1</p>	<p><i>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28</i></p> <p>On Monday April 9, 2007 our beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother</p> <p>BASTIANA (Betty) VAN WYNGAARDEN (nee van Wingerden)</p> <p>died with her six children by her side at the Brantford General Hospital in her 81st year.</p> <p>Pre-deceased by her dear husband Teunis van Wyngaarden (1981).</p> <p>She was sustained through her life by God's faithfulness and leaves to God's continued care: her children Nell & Henk; Rika & Henry de Jonge; Bill & Sylvia; Dirk & Elaine; Tony & Louise; and Joanne & Charles Baldwin; her 22 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren; brothers Nico and Engel, and sisters Janna Nomen and Leentje Leenman.</p> <p>Those who wish may make a donation to the Brantford Christian School.</p> <p>Correspondence: Dirk van Wyngaarden 15 Glenwood Drive Brantford ON N3S 3E9</p> <p>EELKJE VISSER a resident of Orillia, formerly of Chatham, passed on peacefully into the loving arms of her Saviour, Monday, April 9, 2007, at the Leacock Care Centre, Orillia in her 94th year.</p> <p>Beloved wife of the late John Visser 1998, and mother of the late John Visser Jr 1998.</p> <p>Mother of Peter (Martha), Jack (Renate), Olga (Jim) Upton, Mary (Peter De Haan) and Grace (Jeff) Nielsen. Grandmother of 29, and great-grandmother of many. Also survived by sisters Patricia Sluys, Wilhelmina Heemsbergen, brother Jochem Groot, and daughter-in-law Janice Visser.</p> <p>Friends and family were received at the Bowman Funeral Home on Thursday, April 12, 2007, and the funeral service was held on Friday, April 13, 2007 at Grace CRC in Chatham, with Pastor Ralph Koops and Pastor William Koopmans officiating. Those wishing to make a memorial contribution are asked to consider the World Home Bible League.</p> <p>Online condolences are welcome to: gracenielsen@hotmail.com or send to: 31 Edmunds Crescent London ON N5Z 4J1</p> <p>MAAIKE VENEMA (nee Toering) October 13, 1923 - March 30, 2007</p> <p>Surrounded by the love of her family, she was peacefully taken to be with the Lord on March 30, 2007 at the age of 83. Rejoined with her husband of 51 years, Sybren, who passed away in December 2005. Their faith has become sight.</p> <p>Maaiké was born in the town of Lemmer in Friesland, the Netherlands on October 13th, 1923. She was the third of 6 children born to Arend and Elizabeth (Koomstra) Toering. Maaiké was a dear sister to two older brothers and three younger sisters.</p> <p>At the age of 22 she started her studies to become a nurse, and while working at the Valerius Kliniek in Amsterdam she met Sybren Venema who was also a nurse there. Sybren wanted to emigrate to Canada and when he left in 1953 they kept up a regular correspondence, developing a closer relationship and falling in love. After Sybren made a visit to Holland to propose, Maaiké joined him in Canada where they were married in Bowmanville on Nov. 6, 1954. They settled in Toronto where they had four children. Maaiké continued her nursing career and eventually retired from Thistletown Regional Centre in Rexdale in 1989.</p> <p>Together, Maaiké and Sybren faithfully attended Second CRC of Toronto (later renamed Covenant Reformed Church) and were members even after moving to Holland Christian Homes in Brampton in January of 2002.</p> <p>The last several years were not easy ones for her - she had severe arthritis and underwent several operations, but in spite of her own physical ailments she was devoted to caring for Sybren when he became ill. She was faithful and brave, generous and stalwart, and unflinchingly made her family a priority, providing them with constant love and support. She was a friend that loved unconditionally and is missed by many.</p> <p>Maaiké leaves behind her four children, Ryk Venema (Baukje), Liesje Cini (Dave), Yolanda Douglas (Steve) and Allan Venema (Tina), as well as 9 grandchildren (Chantel, Ryk, Alyson, Anan, Shaun, Jeffrey, Kyle, Allaina and Aerin), and 2 great-grandchildren (Autumn and Eleisha).</p> <p>The family can be reached at: yndouglas@cox.net or: 10119 Rothgard Road, Spring Valley CA 91977 USA</p>	

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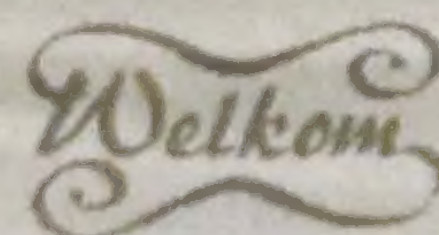
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See Calendar of Events for details.

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mail: **Georgetown CRC, PO Box 45**
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Dr. A. Guldmond, Executive Director
Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools
617 Garner Road, E.,
Ancaster ON L9G 3K9

Informal inquiries can be made to the
Executive Director at adriang@oacs.org.



www.oacs.org

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Interested candidates should apply in confidence by May 18th to:

Chief Executive Officer

Parkview Meadows Retirement Village,

72 Town Centre Drive, Townsend Ontario NOA 1S0

Fax (519) 587-5692, e-mail: tknight@parkviewmeadows.ca

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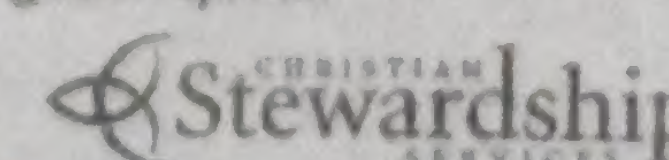
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Classifieds

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Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- May 4** Liberation Day celebration, Maranatha CRC, Cambridge. See page 22 for details.
- May 5** Retirement celebration for Clarence Bos, Principal of Clinton and District Christian School. He is retiring from his career in education at the end of the 2006/07 school year. Social begins at 7:30 pm and a tribute begins at 8:00 pm. Participate in the tribute by calling Ann Reinink at 519.523.4806 or email cdcs@tcc.on.ca See www.clintonchristian.ca/retirement for information.
- May 19, 20** Georgetown CRC 50th anniversary celebrations. Details to follow in April 30th issue or email: info@gcrc.on.ca. Website: www.gcrc.on.ca
- May 26** Laurentian Hills Christian School 40th anniversary, 11 Laurentian Dr, Kitchener, ON. Dinner, program, \$15/person. To reserve by May 1st., call Mrs Grift 519-576-6700 or Mrs. Olthoff 519-742-5152. Check the web site for more details at www.lhcs.ws
- May 28- June 1** "A Vacation with a Christian Perspective" ~ The annual Milk & Honey Summer Festival at Redeemer University College will be held May 28 - June 1, 2007. This unique vacation offers a week of relaxation as well as cultural and spiritual stimulation. Highlights include guided tours, banquets, informative lectures, fellowship and entertainment. Join Dr Bert Polman and Professor Ray Louter as they explore the theme "Psalms of Lament and Psalms of Rejoicing." For more information or to register, call 905-648-2139 ext. 4521.
- June 9, 10** The First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville 50 year celebration. Banquet on June 9 and worship service on June 10. Contact Harmen Boersma (613-258-5565).
- June 13** Hollandse Dag 10 a.m. at the Moorefield Community Centre. Details in May 14th issue or phone Hilbert Rumph at 1-519-638-2053.



Liberation Day!

Stories of God's preserving love.
Join us for an

evening of remembrance and celebration:

remembrance of the horrors of war, conflict, occupation and hardship; and celebration of God's preserving love through years of deception, hunger, and savagery and in the liberation that followed. Find out why, to this day, the relationships of Canadians and Dutch are so strong. Hear accomplished singers *Nathaniel Wiseman*, *Tavis Weber*, and *Keith Diplock* who are all embarking on their professional careers as they are joined with our young people under the direction of *Dina Zomer* to weave a tapestry of stories into an evening of celebration and remembrance. "To you, from failing hands, we throw the torch, be yours to hold it high . . . "Help us remember! At the going down of the sun and the rising of the dawn, we shall remember them . . . the oppressor, the liberator and the occupied.

Plan to attend.

Friday, May 4, 2007, 7:45 p.m.

Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, 94 Elgin St. South, Cambridge, ON
(519) 623-8151 office@maranathacrc.com
Tickets available at the church office.



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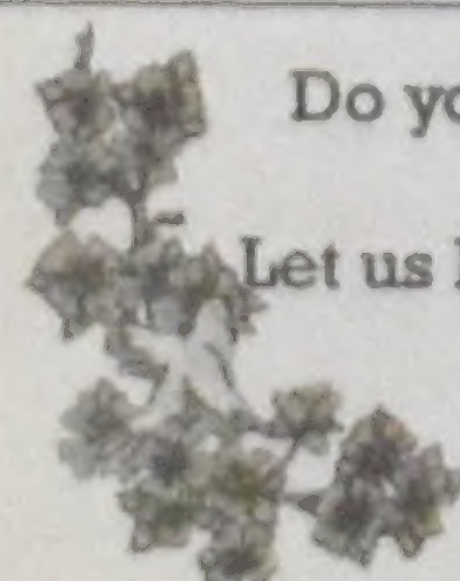
looks forward to celebrating its

50th anniversary

on the weekend of May 19th and 20th.

We cordially invite you to celebrate with us. Our celebrations begin on Saturday, May 19th, with a social between 4:00 - 7:00 pm. At the Georgetown District Christian School (next door to our church) and conclude with a special thanksgiving service on Sunday, May 20th at 10:00 am.

For more information, please contact us at info@gcrc.on.ca
or call 905-877-4322

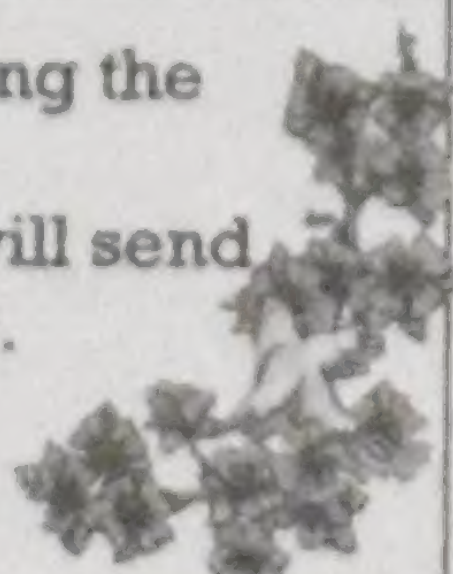


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News

Why Sudan is now allowing UN troops in Darfur

Sudan announced it would allow 3,000 international peacekeepers in, leading the US and Britain to increase pressure.

Howard LaFranchi

WASHINGTON — International pressure from the United Nations, Arab leaders, and the United States played a role in Sudan's concession this week to allow 3,000 UN peacekeepers into the country's troubled Darfur region.

So, apparently, did the image concerns of China — both one of Sudan's biggest commercial partners and an increasingly outgoing international power — as it prepares to host the 2008 Summer Olympics.

But while some international leaders are jumping to praise Sudan's uncustomary openness to international intervention in Darfur, the US and Britain are seizing the moment to increase pressure on Sudan.

As the conflict that has left more than 200,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced continues unabated, questions are surfacing over which approach is likely to stem the crisis most quickly.

Some experts say Sudan simply continues to play the international community by stringing out its concessions to make them appear to be major breakthroughs, even though they are unlikely to get at the heart of Darfur's strife.

"It isn't going to make a huge difference who in the international community has got the approach to this announcement right, or even how quickly the government of Sudan acts on it, because the whole issue of UN troops has been blown out of proportion compared to what they can really do," says Alex de Waal, a Darfur expert and program director with the Social Science Research Council in New York.

"International troops are ancillary to a peace agreement for Darfur," he adds. "They are not going to be the main event of a conflict that requires a political solution."

While that may be true, international leaders — ranging from Western officials facing domestic pressure to stop what the US has termed a genocide, to Arab and African leaders increasingly fed up with the inaction of a neighboring regime — are hoping international intervention will help pave the way for a political settlement.

Goal to send 21,000 peacekeepers

The goal of the international community, as set out by the UN Security Council last August, is to get a force of 21,000 peacekeepers from the United Nations and the African Union into Darfur.

The Sudanese government on Monday



agreed to allow 3,000 armed UN peacekeepers to augment the 7,000-strong African Union force already in Darfur. Up until then, Sudan had voiced vehement opposition to the deployment of UN peacekeepers. In its letter to UN officials Monday, Sudan also reversed its stance and accepted the deployment of six attack helicopters for use in defending civilian populations.

After Sudan announced its acceptance of the 3,000 international peacekeepers, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the decision "a very important step" and said the UN and the African Union "intend to move very quickly" on delivering the new forces.

UN lauds Sudan's concession

Mr. Ban had met recently with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Arab leaders to deliver a breakthrough on the international troops. The August Security Council resolution stipulates that the forces could only be deployed with Sudanese approval.

Some observers see the Sudanese decision as an initial victory for Ban, who only took over the secretary-general's post in January. But others, including US officials, were less ebullient about the announcement.

"In all three areas — humanitarian, security, and political — the government of Sudan is not doing what it could" to return peace to Darfur, said Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, after a visit to Sudan on Monday. He called the Sudanese decision "important," but cautioned that the international community would not be letting its guard down.

In New York, the words were even less rosy: "We learned a long time ago not to take these letters at face value," said Alejandro Wolff, the acting US ambassador to the UN.

For some observers, Sudan's decision

reflects China's growing pressure on Khartoum to respond to growing pressures from the international community.

"It shows that one thing is more important to the Chinese than their access to Sudan's oil, and that's the success of their Olympic Games," said actress and Darfur activist Mia Farrow in comments to the Associated Press.

George Ayittey, an Africa expert at American University in Washington, says there is a role for China in solving the Darfur conflict — but he says it lies more in having China pressing Sudan to deal with the Darfur crisis in the African context.

"Sudan is an African problem, and we need an African solution to it," says Mr. Ayittey. "Once we talk about [UN] peacekeepers the problem is out of Africa," he says. "But this has to be addressed in Africa by the full range of people involved."

Mr. Ayittey says the model should be South Africa and its dismantlement of apartheid, an effort that did not "just involve two sides, but all elements of society." If the Darfur conflict is only addressed in terms of the government and rebels, he says, it will not be solved.

De Waal says the janjaweed, the pro-government Arab militia terrorizing the Darfur population, will never be disarmed by peacekeepers — that will take an internal Sudanese political solution.

De Waal says the danger of Sudan's latest agreement is that what he calls the "more-has-to-be-done crowd" will be enthralled by it, instead of looking for more viable solutions.

"It's not 'we need to do more,' " he says, "but at this point we need to rethink and say 'maybe we need to do things differently.'"

News briefs

Down with trees

The hot topic of global warming is generating all sorts of new stories. It's wonderful that stories that raise our anxiety level tend to be so prolific.

The slow genocide in Darfur, some are now saying, was caused by global warming. That's not as absurd as it sounds: herders are competing with farmers for territory as the desert spreads.

As mathematicians and scientists tinker with their complex models, they keep discovering new connections. At one time it was thought that trees retard global warming (a cool thought in a green shade). After all, they "breathe in" CO2 and breathe out oxygen.

According to a recent study, however, planting more trees will not cool the planet, but heat it up. It has to do with the color of trees: they are dark, not bright, so they do not reflect the sun's radiation back out into space. Instead, they are heat absorbers.

Dr. Bala, of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in California, and his colleagues said that if all the world's forests were clearcut, the planet would actually be cooler.

Before you get out your chainsaws, they hurried to add that they didn't recommend such radical therapy. Now, if we took our chainsaws to people...especially those with large "carbon footprints".... No, no one has suggested that — at least, not yet.

Excitement is high in the scientific community at the start of the hurricane season. Most have predicted an increase in the number and severity of storms. However, according to one model, warming might actually reduce the number of hurricanes. Wind shear — the difference in wind speed between winds in the upper and lower altitudes — may reduce hurricane activity. It can actually decapitate a hurricane before it builds up a head of steam.

Whew! We may not have to cut down the trees after all!

First corn, now chickens

ConocoPhillips and Tyson Foods, an oil company and a food company, are teaming up to turn chicken fat into biofuel. Move over corn and soybean farmers, the poultry farmers are no dumb clucks: they're looking for a government subsidy too. Remember those Amaco ads — "Put a tiger in your tank"? Soon we'll see: "Put a chicken in your tank." My engine has long ago stopped purring like a cat and has begun clucking like a chicken.

The timing of the joint venture may have something to do with the recent discovery of tissue from a leg bone of a Tyrannosaurus rex. Scientists have concluded that T. rex is really an oversized chicken.

We've found lots of dinosaur bones before, but this time scientists actually found some DNA too. This led to speculation that scientists might actually be able to clone T. rex.

It would make a much better slogan, too, wouldn't it: "Put a T. rex in your tank."